New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1945

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THEATRE OPENINGS

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"Deep Are the Roots"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

"Live Life Again"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 1, 1945

'Live Life Again' Is A Bitter Night With Prairie Paranoiacs

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Oh, the pain of it!
His mammy died
And they buried her in a setting
Constructed by the Studio Alliance
And designed by Albert Johnson.

Oh, the pain of it!
But it was all very natural
Because the whole bloody play took place
Soon after the Turn of the Century
At Bison Run, Nebraska.

Ah, the beauty of it!
A man said, "I got to kill a hog afore it's dark."
A girl said, "My love is all I have to give—a thing quite poor."
The boy said, "My mammy done tole me."
But the boy was a big crybaby and nobody should have loved him.
I didn't love him.

His pappy was a nice man with a nice voice
And he loved a Swede girl who could cook but was awful dumb.
The boy didn't like this and I didn't either.

Oh, the horror of it!
There was Paw and the new Maw
Together.
In came son and gun
Paw grabbed son and gun
Boom!
Exit Paw.

When I left the Belasco
It looked as though
Dan Totheroh
Had laid an egg.

Plays in blank verse
Make me curse.

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'LIVE LIFE AGAIN.'

Play by Dan Totheroh; staged by Sawyer Falk; settings by Albert Johnson; costumes by Grace Houston; presented at the Belasco Theater by K. S. Kreilberg Saturday evening, September 29, 1945. The cast:

Preacher Hill	Edward Bushman
Mrs. Jones	Kay MacDonald
Mrs. Smith	Isabel Bishop
Mrs. Brown	Ruth Sattle
Mrs. White	Phoebe Mackay
Mrs. Black	Mathilde Baring
Mrs. Green	Florence Rexford
Mr. Smith	Lester Lonergan Jr.
Mr. Jones	Bruce Halsey
Mr. Brown	Pat Smith
Mr. White	Robert Gardet
Mr. Black	Kenneth Peaslee
Mr. Green	James Coyle
Spiers	Parker Fennelly
Nathan Spiers	Zachary A. Charles
Judith Spiers	Mary Rolfe
Greer, the Gravedigger	John O. Hewitt
Mark Orme	Donald Buka
Paul Orme	Thomas Chalmers
Hilda Paulson	Beatrice de Neergaard
Dr. Bush	Harold Meltzer
Rose	Mary Fowlan
Mrs. Heaney	Grace Mills

NEW YORK POST.

OCTOBER 1, 1945

Totheroh's 'Live Life Again' A Fascinating Experiment

By Wilella Waldorf

The theatre is growing up. It is doing some experimenting in defiance of Broadway rules and getting away with it in startling fashion. After being drugged for so long on dramatic package goods manufactured almost exclusively for the Hollywood trade, it is staggering to reflect that Tennessee Williams' "Glass Menagerie" has been a "smash hit" ever since its arrival late last March, and now to encounter Dan Totheroh's "Live Life Again," a play in blank verse laid on the Nebraska prairie back in the early 1900s, boldly produced in the classic style. It came to the Belasco last Saturday night.

There is quality and distinction in the writing and the presentation of "Live Life Again," which brings Mr. Totheroh back to the theatre where he belongs after an absence of nine years. But what is rarer still, there is ample evidence at the Belasco that author, director (Sawyer Falk) and designer (Albert Johnson), instead of being introduced a couple of hours before rehearsals started, must have done a great deal of careful planning and given much serious thought to the preparation of a production that solves in striking fashion some of the perplexing problems that invariably bedevil the works of dramatic poets.

Mark Orme, a farmer's son, whose bookish taste and sensitive spirit have sent him away from the prairie to boarding school, is called home too late to attend the funeral of a mother deeply loved. A Nebraska Hamlet, if you will, Mark suspects the father he has always hated of having murdered her, especially when that father decides to marry again with what the son considers undue haste.

Dr. Bush, the village medico, knows nothing of modern psychiatry, but it soon becomes evident to the audience that young Orme is the victim of an uncommonly strong Oedipus Complex. His beloved mother, who had always hated his father, rules him in death more than she did in life, even coming between him and Judith Spears, his childhood sweetheart. The neighbors, of course, think him mad.

Mr. Johnson has designed a stylized background for the play that often uses steps as a foreground in the classic manner, and is singularly effective in this blend of Greek tragedy, Shakespeare and Nebraska farm life that Mr. Totheroh has conceived. Nor is the designer in his interiors afraid to show symbolic figures hovering over the Orme home where the departed mother's spirit is still dominant.

Mr. Falk's task as director is anything but an easy one, but the play has genuine theatrical vitality and most of its principal actors manage to speak the Totheroh verse simply and expressively, conveying its poetic quality without letting themselves be frightened by it.

Donald Buka, a young actor who has shown great promise in several previous plays that never stayed around very long, plays Mark Orme with deep feeling and intensity. He handles the difficult part with understanding and skill. Equally fine is Thomas Chalmers, who gives a most affecting performance as the father. Mary Rolfe as the sweetheart plays an emotional role with conviction and restraint, while Beatrice de Neergaard and Parker Fennelly are helpful in other parts.

Where Mr. Falk's direction falters, it seems to us, is in the handling of the group of neighborhood women who act as a sort of Greek chorus from time to time. True, they did improve as they went along, but all too often some of the minor players seemed uncomfortably amateurish, both in speech and in action, while their stage grouping was sometimes awkward and clumsy. A distressing flaw in an otherwise impressive production.

"Live Life Again" is not only an imaginative and moving drama, but a fascinating theatrical exercise that should not fail to draw the attention of anyone seriously interested in stagecraft. Argue about it if you will, question its merits if you must, but don't miss it.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

OCTOBER 1, 1945.

By Burton Rascoe

'Live Life Again' Offered Sincerely but Proves a Bore

In presenting Dan Totheroh's tragedy in verse, "Live Life Again," at the Belasco on Saturday night, S. S. Krellberg is to be congratulated upon his courage; but not on his discernment. With eight sets and 23 players, the offering is an ambitious undertaking, but it is such a dreadful bore that it is certain to be a costly failure.

"Live Life Again," I suspect, is one of those earnest and deeply-felt literary compositions that read much better than they act, like Stephen Phillip's "Paolo and Francesca," and therefore Mr. Krellberg is to be forgiven a certain naivete. This is his first offering as a producer and I have no doubt that he thought he was contributing much to the advancement of the serious drama. He has yet to learn that good drama must be good theater too.

Parallels to Hamlet.

Written in free, blank and rhymed verse, "Live Life Again" smells to high heavens of midnight oil. Mr. Totheroh, knowing that the essence of "Hamlet" is universal—and yet having a rather peculiar idea of what "Hamlet" is about—undertook to write another "Hamlet," with the setting in a prairie village called Bison Run, in Nebraska, around 1900. Audacious, isn't he?

His play has many deliberate correspondences to "Hamlet." You recognize Mark Orme (played by Donald Buka) as the melancholy Dane; Judith Spiers (played by Mary Rolfe) as Ophelia; Spiers (played by Parker Fennelly) as Polonius; the grave digger (played by John O. Hewitt) as—in our time—Whitford Kane; Saul Orme (played by Thomas Chalmers) as Claudius; and so on. There is even a soliloquy in the second act, delivered by Mr. Buka—which seemed as though it were going to last until Doomsday—that corresponds to the first soliloquy in "Hamlet." Also there is a scene in which Mr. Buka rejects his sweetheart that corresponds to the scene wherein Hamlet bids Ophelia to hie herself to a nunnery, because he has more urgent business, than love, afoot.

Like Old Family Album.

But watching "Live Life Again" is not like seeing a play performed. It is like looking at a series of hand-colored stereopticon slides, reproduced from a family album. The symbolic sets by Albert Johnson and the costumes by Grace Houston heightened that impression; for they are so very like the props and backgrounds of a tintype or daguerreotype photographer of 50 years ago.

Some of the "slides" in this projection are fairly interesting. The drawback is that the figures are animated and that they have speeches to make. For all that they talk in verse, their sentiments are expressed in the melodramatic formulae of "Way Down East" and "Bertha, the Beautiful Cloak Model."

My sympathies go to the Messrs. Chalmers and Buka and to the Misses de Neergaard and Rolfe. They have learned long, difficult speeches and business and have acquitted themselves well to so little purpose.

New York Journal-American

Oct. 1, 1945—

'Live Life Again' Opens at Belasco

By ROBERT GARLAND

This Dan Totheroh is a great playwright for trying. If at first he doesn't succeed, he tries, tries again. There was "Wild Birds" in 1925. There was "Distant Drums" in 1932. There was "Moor Born" in 1934. There was "Mother Lode" (with George O'Neil) in the same year. There was "Searching for the Sun" in 1936. And there was "Live Life Again" night before last at the Belasco Theatre.

"Live Life Again" is better read than seen. Far better, even if you don't ask me. I've read it and I've seen it, so I think I ought to know. I read it one sultry afternoon in late July. Having read it, it left me calm, cool and mildly, if not wildly, enthusiastic. I saw it one chilly evening in late September. Having seen it, it left me calm, cool and mildly, if not wildly, unenthusiastic.

Acted out up on the stage of what is certainly Broadway's most depressing theatrical interior, "Live Life Again" turns out to be as protracted as it is pretentious. Maybe I'll know what I mean when I say that it strikes me as being congenitally of the "little theatre." It would be more at home, I feel, just off a college campus, or, here in New York, somewhere south of the Macy-Gimbel Line.

• • •

Cult of Mom

From first to last, "Live Life Again" has to do with what Philip Wylie writes of as "the great American cult of Mom." From start to finish, the piece at the Belasco goes on—and on!—to show how Mark Orme loves his maternal parent not wisely, but too well. Out there on the Albert Johnson prairie surrounding Nebraska's Bison Run, the boy worships his mother not only while she is alive.

Mark worships Mom even more when she is dead. And Effie Orme is dead and buried when the curtain rises on "Live Life Again" in 44th st. As a matter of memory-searching, Gravedigger Greer is finishing his melancholy chore while Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. White, Mrs. Black and Mrs. Green are gossiping their heads off about their gone-but-not-forgotten neighbor.

What's left of the evening—and there's plenty—tells how the late Mrs. Orme's husband marries his hired girl; how the late Mrs. Orme's son doesn't marry his sweetheart and how the late Mrs. Orme, in spirit rather than in substance, hangs around the homestead, driving husband, son and sweetheart nearly crazy. Mom does drive her offspring crazy as the last long curtain falls.

• • •

First Half Dozen

Dan Totheroh's sixth, and latest, attempt at Broadway playwriting has been painstakingly, almost reverently, produced by the S. S. Krellberg who is part owner of the Belasco Theatre. Sawyer Falk has come down from the university at Syracuse to give it the benefit of his collegiate direction. Albert Johnson and Grace Houston have done more than right by the scenery and the costumes.

Donald Buka has come out of "Bright Boy" and off the airways to make the mother-haunted Mark Orme as believable, as bearable, as is humanly possible. Mary Rolf has come out of "Wallflower" and off the airways to make Mark Orme's frustrated sweetheart as desirable, as deserted, as her creator so obviously intended.

Thomas Chalmers, another refugee from the radio, brings the skill of his histrionics and the resonance of his voice to the role of Mark Orme's more-sinned-against-than-sinning father. And yet, in spite of all these and other admirable attributes, Don Totheroh's "Live Life Again" fails rather dismally to materialize as the fine piece of all-American Gothic it quite obviously sets out to be.

NEW YORK PM,
OCTOBER 1, 1945

—*Kronenberger*—

Very Blank Verse Indeed

PM Reviews

A reviewer probably faces no more unhappy job than having to write about a completely earnest play that is also a hopelessly bad one. In the circumstances, it is perhaps most merciful to be brief, and I shan't drag out my autopsy over *Live Life Again*. Mr. Totheroh has written a verse-drama about a youth whose deep attachment to his mother while she lives becomes pathological after her death. He cannot adjust himself; he hears his mother's voice while holding his girl in his arms; he becomes obsessed with the idea that his father, whom he has always hated, murdered his mother; and when his father remarries, shoots him. Only then, through his father's dying words, does he begin to see the situation sanely.

This is a sombre tale of a sick soul—a sufficiently dangerous and difficult theme for prose. Mr. Totheroh has enormously added to his difficulties by using verse—a medium whose heightened language demands a correspondingly heightened emotional intensity. As drama, *Live Life Again* is a pretty blundering and inept page of Freud; as verse, it is dismal. The slack, fibreless, "correct" lines, the endless commonplace figures of speech, the otiose poetical references to Nature make even the climactic moments of *Live Life Again* distant and unreal, and occasionally absurd. Hence, far from being convinced by the boy's plight, one is never made to care about it.

The cast—Donald Buka as the boy, Mary Rolfe as the girl, Thomas Chalmers as the father, and so on—tries, but is hamstrung.

—Louis Kronenberger.

NEW YORK TIMES,
OCTOBER 1, 1945.

Nebraska Hamlet

By LEWIS NICHOLS

In most of his plays Dan Totheroh has discussed the prairie and the early West. His people have been of the gold fields and the covered wagon and the widening, growing country. On Saturday evening at the Belasco he added another manuscript to the list, a verse drama called "Live Life Again." On this trip he is in Nebraska, where a boy is growing to hate his father, and if Mr. Totheroh wishes to pull a twist on "Hamlet" that is his private business. But in the process he has written a remarkably poor and lifeless play. The Belasco on Saturday seethed with words without passion, verse without poetry.

Mr. Totheroh's young man has been away at school when his mother dies. The first scene shows the funeral, the boy returning too late. Then the memories of his mother turn him from the girl he loves, turn him also against his father. He concludes that his mother had been murdered, and when his father marries the hired girl he is convinced. Voices speak to him, and, crazed, he goes after his parent with a rifle. As his father dies, in one of the worst scenes of bathos of the year, he realizes that all he had wanted was love. It took a shot and homicide for him to find out that fact.

"Live Life Again" runs fully on the largest rock which can wreck a play in verse—it sounds pretentious. Too often Mr. Totheroh reaches for a scanning cliché. There are such sentences as "I saw your light and blundered to it like a moth" and "The gossamer trembles on the grass," which are not Nebraska, even at its Hellenic best. Mr. Totheroh also offers a group of gossipping women as a chorus, and there is a Jeeter Lesterlike figure as his Cassandra. When Mr. Totheroh is pursuing the classical muse the chase is wholehearted, if inadvised.

Donald Buka is the young man and has the misfortune of not yet being able to play the rural Hamlet, assuming that anyone could do so fully. Thomas Chalmers is the sedate, stolid father, who merely wanted affection and was murdered for it, and Mary Rolfe is the girl. Miss Rolfe is easy and rather natural. As the hired girl, Beatrice de Neergaard speaks her piece in Swedish accent, and Parker Fennelly is nasal as the aged one who says nothing good will come of anything. The neighbors are called Brown, White, Black, Green, Smith and Jones, possibly to show the universality of "Live Life Again."

Except from the above indictment Albert Johnson's settings. They are fine.

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
OCTOBER 1, 1945.

= By HOWARD BARNES =

A Thing Quite Poor

A SHOCKING piece of blank-verse mumbo-jumbo, "Live Life Again," has come to the Belasco. It has a dull and psychopathic theme. Methinks it should have died a-borning. For the brutal truth is that this Dan Totheroh rehash of "Hamlet," "The Silver Cord" and some weird ideas of his own is right up there for top honors as the sorriest offering of a stumbling season. The obvious sincerity of the author is no excuse for his dramatic malfeasance. The verse has no more eloquence than a tree toad's chirping. A tale about a boy who woos his dead mother in a Nebraska cemetery, circa 1904, is as luminous as a swamp fog.

* * *

There is no good reason why verse should not be employed in the theater. It has been handled rather effectively in the past, from Shakespeare to Maxwell Anderson. In "Live Life Again" it merely trips up players and wearies spectators. When the protagonist tosses off lines like "My love is all I have to give—a thing quite poor" and a minor actor leaves a funeral remarking: "I got to git back home to kill a hog," any hint of honest stage illusion is shattered beyond any hope of repair.

* * *

Thomas Chalmers, as the hapless father of the Oedipus character in the work, brings strength, good reading and glints of meaning to the part. Had Totheroh served him better with a script it might have been an impressive performance. As it stands, it merely accentuates the fumbling aspects of a singularly ill-advised production. Since Sawyer Falk has directed it with symbolic overtones which are never anything but pretentious, Chalmers can be said to have had a raw deal.

As for Donald Buka, he quite fails to give any significance to the part of the son, who is forever talking to a cemetery scarecrow, ornamented by a cast-off dress of the fat lady in the circus, and Mary Rolfe is not much better as the girl who loves a lad who should have been in the grinny house from the first-act curtain. The players work hard, but the atrocious blank verse and the fancy Albert Johnson settings stop them dead in their tracks. Incest, latent or actual, is a fit subject for dramatic consideration, but it merely leaves a bad taste in your mouth and a feeling of fantastic ennui at the Belasco.

NEW YORK SUN,
OCTOBER 1, 1945

'Live Life Again,' Offered at Belasco, Ponderous Drama of the Prairie.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Bison Run, Neb., in the early years of this century, came into the New York theater Saturday evening as the locale of a troubled and ponderous drama called "Live Life Again," by Dan Totheroh. A study of a complex-ridden boy, this new piece, for all the author's earnestness, provides a dreary evening from beginning to end.

Totheroh's play is done in verse. It depicts, gropingly, the desolation of a brooding farm boy with a mother fixation. She is dead as the story begins and in his own Hamlet-like way he suspects dark misdeeds. He remains in more or less constant communication with his mother and it's after his father has married for a second time, taking the Swedish hired girl from Black Snake Crick as his bride, that young Mark Orme resolves to avenge his mother's death. He goes after his father with a gun.

And so, in the old man's dying moments, long-dormant father-and-son love is revealed. By that time the self-tortured Prince of Bison Run has put himself and everybody else, audience included, through no end of suffering.

All of this is told in Totheroh verse and dialogue, in the stark settings of Albert Johnson, and to the directorial inventions and proddings of Sawyer Falk, dean of the drama department of Syracuse University. It is quite apparent that Director Falk has worked tirelessly in his staging, fussing particularly with the groupings of the chattering womenfolk, and "Live Life Again" probably seemed both imaginative and startling when given its upstate presentation. But in 44th Street it is quite out of place—and it has all the uncertainty of a collegiate production.

S. S. Krellberg, in opening the season at the Belasco, and in making his debut as a producer, took his time in assembling what seemed the right cast for the Totheroh drama, but the players on the Belasco stage can't do much with "Live Life Again." Donald Buka has a somewhat trying evening as the grieving Nebraska boy, fiercely possessed by a mother-love obsession. Thomas Chalmers, a bluff and dependable actor, is the bewildered father, forever locked out of the affections of wife and son since the boy was born.

Mary Rolfe has the role of the agonized sweetheart, unable to reach or retain young Mark because he is forever being summoned by the dead, his mother's voice coming to him in the cornfield and all sorts of places. Beatrice de Neergaard is the mute housegirl Hilda, who marries into the very best home in Bison Run. Grace Houston has supplied effective costumes of the period.

"Live Life Again" is as bleak as the prairie by night. The Belasco will try again, and will do better, as the season goes along.

"Carib Song"

NEW YORK POST,
SEPTEMBER 28, 1945

'Carib Song' Has Good Music, Dancing and Tropical Languor

By Wilella Waldorf

Baldwin Bergersen has written some attractive music, and at least one definite song hit, for "Carib Song," William Archibald's folk play of Trinidad in which Katherine Dunham opened an engagement last night at the Adelphi Theatre. The song hit is "Sleep, Baby, Don't Cry," sung by Harriet Jackson while Miss Dunham rests luxuriously in the center of the stage after some very strenuous West Indian exertions.

"Carib Song" is so tastefully presented and some individual scenes are so charming that it is a pity the production as a whole lacks the variety necessary to sustain interest for an entire evening. We must confess, however, that Miss Dunham's dance recitals usually affect us the same way—after two or three West Indian orgies, they begin to look and sound very much alike. We admire, and enjoy, Miss Dunham's dancing and that of her company very much, but they affect us like certain exotic tropical fruits. We can take just so much at one time.

"Carib Song" is not a dance recital but a musical play and we had hoped it would prove striking and unusual enough to cheer about. Mr. Archibald's "play," however, is a very slender triangle story wherein Miss Dunham, wife of a husky corn grower (William Franklin), is attracted by a fisherman (Avon Long) and natives in the vicinity start a whispering campaign against her.

Although the Dunham Dancers, headed by Miss Dunham herself, occasionally take to the stage in a frenzy of pagan excitement that is sure to delight their army of followers, a tropical lethargy often hangs over "Carib Song."

Consequently when Avon Long stepped out in the middle of the first act and sang and danced a rythmic number called "Woman Is a Rascal," the audience decided not to let him go. The conductor granted so many encores that it appeared for a while Mr. Long would be at it all night. This was his big moment, or rather, his big twenty minutes, and since he was only occasionally present the rest of the evening, it was nice to see him have his fling.

Later on he did try again, but the song was inferior and soon passed away. William Franklin's sonorous singing as the deceived husband was up to concert pitch and Mr. Bergersen's score is studded with insinuating melodies and fascinating rhythms, cleverly orchestrated by Ted Royal.

Miss Dunham's most effective solo number is "A Girl She Can't Remain," and the production is designed with tropical elegance by Jo Mielziner and provided with typically Dunhamesque costumes by Motley. Miss Dunham has a habit of running around carrying her shoes in one hand, and wearing colorful, exotically draped skirts with something atop that looks like an old fashioned corset cover.

We came out of "Carib Song" last night humming "Sleep, Baby, Don't Cry."

'CARIB SONG.'

Musical play by William Archibald; music by Baldwin Bergersen; lyrics by William Archibald; book directed by Mary Hunter; choreography by Katherine Dunham; scenery designed and lighted by Jo Mielziner; costumes designed by Motley; musical director, Pembroke Davenport; orchestrations by Ted Royal; presented by George Stanton at the Adelphi Theater, Thursday, September 27, 1945. The cast:

The Singer.....Harriet Jackson
The Friends,
Eulabel Riley and Mary Lewis
The Fat Woman.....Mable Sanford Lewis
The Tall Woman.....Mercedes Gilbert
The Husband.....William Franklin
The Fisherman.....Avon Long
The Woman.....Katherine Dunham
The Fishwoman.....Elsie Benjamin
The Madras Seller.....Byron Cuttler
The Shango Priest.....La Rosa Estrada
The Boy Possessed By a Snake,
Tommy Gomez
The Leaders of the Shango Dancers,
Vanoye Aikens, Lucille Ellis

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
SEPTEMBER 28, 1945

By HOWARD BARNES

"I Ain't Like"

A SORT of calypso gavotte is being presented at the Adelphi under the definition of "a musical play of the West Indies." It is long on dancing, middling on music and very short on drama. Katherine Dunham, the star and choreographer of "Carib Song," has turned her talents to great advantage in the show, whether she is executing a ritualistic Negro dance charade or guiding her disciples through the undulant and repetitious shuffling which gives the production some slight distinction. William Archibald, who is responsible for the book, has the players mumbling, "I ain't know" and "I ain't like" until one feels like echoing the latter statement.

* * *

Play is a misnomer for anything that occurs on the Adelphi stage these evenings. Through the murk of symbolism and West Indian pidgin English, it is possible for an observant spectator to detect a tiny plot about a farmer's wife who falls in love with a fisherman. It never creates a ripple of theatrical excitement. It is only when Miss Dunham is demonstrating her lore of Caribbean dance craft or when Baldwin Bergerson contributes a good song or two that "Carib Song" becomes anything more than pretentious and tedious.

Miss Dunham is a gifted artist, but she should know better than to substitute rhythmical convolutions for the variety and pace which define the best of Negro musical shows. Too frequently she finds herself in an awkward reclining position when neither libretto nor music permit her to launch on a new scene. The climax she has arranged for the first act, "Shango Ritual," has a frenetic tom-tom insistence about it. A dream sequence may make sense as an obscure interpretation of West Indian witchcraft. It makes parlous little as stage entertainment. Perhaps the whole show should have been billed as a dance recital.

* * *

The best of the star's assistants is Avon Long, who plays the fisherman with a certain dramatic conviction, while singing and dancing brilliantly. He has the calypso numbers to render and he never fails them. William Franklin bumbles through the role of the farmer and Harriet Jackson sings mellifluously as a character noted in the program as "the singer." The fine Jo Mielziner settings belie the proceedings which they frame. So far as "Carib Song" is concerned, this reviewer will hint "I ain't like."

NEW YORK SUN,
SEPTEMBER 28, 1945

'Carib Song' Has Color and Rhythm, but It's a Skimpy and Listless Show.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The first-night trail led last night into the somewhat unfamiliar and more or less uncharted terrain of the mid-Fifties as the Adelphi Theater became the home of "Carib Song," a musical folk play of the West Indies, brought forth by George Stanton. The production obviously lacks the strength as an entertainment to compete in the Broadway song-and-dance field.

Katherine Dunham, who is so expert in choreography, is starred in "Carib Song," which brings to the stage of the Adelphi jungle rhythms, weird groupings and incantations, vivid colorings, imaginative ensemble effects—and very little play.

"Carib Song," as it runs to story—William Archibald's story—recites a simple tale of the infidelity of a corn planter's beautiful wife, who gives herself to the village fisherman, becomes pregnant and is murdered by her husband. Miss Dunham plays the unfaithful wife, and it must be said that her talents as a singer and actress are by no means comparable to her gifts as a dancer. Avon Long, speaking in the idiom of the West Indies, plays the seducer, and William Franklin is the avenging husband.

The music for "Carib Song," written by Baldwin Bergersen, is pleasant enough and there are two particularly good numbers—"Woman Is a Rascal," sung by Avon Long, and "Sleep, Baby, Don't Cry," done by Harrjet Jackson. And William Franklin comes through with "You Know, Oh Lord."

Miss Dunham and Mary Hunter have staged the production and the choreography is Miss Dunham's, of course. Jo Mielziner has contributed the lighting effects and some striking Caribbean backgrounds. The bright costumes were supplied by Motley.

Katherine Dunham, in turning to the dramatic musical play, has sought to combine song, dance and drama, but it appeared last night that the effort will be quite unsuccessful. "Carib Song" has color and rhythm and offers some magical dancing, particularly in the Shango ritual, but it's an entertainment that is on the skimpy side and it comes forth as a very listless show.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
SEPTEMBER 28, 1945

'Carib Song' a Frequently Exciting, Creepy West Indian Jungle Show

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Right from the opening notes of the overture of "Carib Song" you have the feeling that you are going to see something remarkable—and you are right.

Katherine Dunham's musical is not like any Negro show you ever saw before. It is an eerie, pulse-stirring, blood-chilling thing which has crept, oozed, squawked, cackled and twitched its way out of some West Indies jungle. It is Miss Dunham's old Tropical Revue in part, but with a thread of plot and some very, very good new music by Baldwin Bergersen added.

My one quarrel with "Carib Song," as it was presented last night at the Adelphi, is the sameness of several of its numbers. Too infrequently is the jungle beat—the bongo beat, they tell me—varied; too seldom is its somber story of a loving husband and an unfaithful wife lightened by so much as a smile. Too often does one production number follow another production number in almost the same setting.

Many Excitements.

These reservations are outweighed, however, by the many excitements offered. Such numbers as a jungle wake, a heathen dance called the Shango, a ghostly dream sequence in a misty forest—these are things to relish and to see again. And the performance of Avon Long as the seafaring interloper who breaks up a happy home is a work of style and distinction. Mr. Long is fascinating, whether he is singing, talking or dancing, and he stops the show—stops it just a bit too long—with a delightful song titled "Woman Is a Rascal."

What there is of the plot is "Porgy and Bess," or maybe a little grand opera. Katherine Dunham, the wife, leaves her plodding, amiable husband (William Franklin) for the adventures offered by Mr. Long. So Mr. Franklin kills her. That's all. Just enough to string all the numbers together.

Straight Songs, Too.

The remarkable Dunham dancers are there, of course, and whenever they are in motion with the drums a-tunking one is plunged into the strange and half-frightening world of black voodoo witches.

Composer Bergersen captures the feeling of this voodoo world—and he can turn out an excellent straight song, too. His lullaby, "Sleep, Baby, Don't Cry," is a melody which also stopped the show—and the lyrics for this and the other songs, by William Archibald, are above average in grace and class. Mr. Franklin and Harriet Jackson handle the solos nicely against a fine choral background of Negro voices.

Joe Mielziner's sets are brooding, tropical and evocative, and the costumes by Motley are properly garish but never gaudy. Pembroke Davenport's orchestra and Tec Royal's arrangements are splendid.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
SEPTEMBER 28, 1945.

By Burton Rascoe

A New Katherine Dunham Emerges in 'Carib Song'

I have good, and very surprising, news today for people like myself, who were rapidly becoming confirmed anti-Katherine Dunhamites. After several years of monkeying around with what I considered the phoniest kind of chi-chi Minsky and the artiest kind of bump and grind stuff (being, in my opinion, neither art nor honest low-burlesque erotica) Miss Dunham has finally stepped up to bat and knocked a home run with "Carib Song," a musical play, which opened at the Adelphi last night.

I had got so tired of the psuedo-cultural cavortings of Miss Dunham and her troupe that I tried to persuade the Messrs. Bagar and Biancolli that, since Miss Dunhan and her arty bunch were primarily concerned with music and dancing, it was up to the music department to cover "Carib Song." But they were obviously tired of her, too; they both said they were very busy with concerts, recitals and what not. I tried Mr. Dana, saying the Katherine Dunham dancers were night club features; but Mr. Dana, like the chorus girl who has a book, had seen the Katherine Dunham dancers. So I was stuck with "Carib Song."

Not Stuck After All.

And what a nice piece of sticking it turned out to be! "Carib Song" is a very unusual and entrancing operetta. The book and lyrics are by William Archibald and the music is Baldwin Bergerson—and what a nice bit of teamwork that is! The choreography is by Miss Dunham, but someone has told her to go back to the honest style that made her famous and cut out the phony, synthetic modernistic stuff. Besides Miss Dunham among the principals there is Avon Long, the engaging scoundrel, Sportin' Life, of "Porgy and Bess." Mr. Long has developed his art of singing and pantomimic dancing far beyond what we have known hitherto and he always has been good. He has something of the spontaneity and rhythmic sense of Fred Astaire. He is a superb performer.

A Little Overdone.

Besides these two there are: Harriet Jackson and William Franklin whose vocalizations are sensuous and thrilling; Byron Cuttler (though not featured) a comic actor of first-rate pantomimic talent; and, of course, such ecstatic Dunham wigglers as Lucille Ellis, Lawaune Ingram and Vanoye Aikens. The social ritualistic, religious and orgiastic dances which Miss Dunham has arranged for herself and them are primitive, priapic apd erotic, frankly depicting the incitements to lust, the taboos and restraints put upon it. But, for the most part, the dancing and pantomime was gay, colorful, joyous, depicting the untutored emotions of West Indian Negroes as they are expressed in their ancient African, jungle dances, modified by the Christian rites and religious practice which have been superimposed upon their voodoo superstitions.

The story tells of a lusty young wench (Miss Dunham) in a West Indian village who was taken to wife by a middle-aged, proper and placid husband (Mr. Franklin) and of how she fell in love with an agile, carefree and poetically persuasive young fisherman who begot a child upon her; and of how the villagers gossiped, giggled and ahunned her; and of how her conscience tormented her until she renounced her lover only to be strangled by her desperately jealous and distracted husband.

It is all beautifully done, with a skillful blending of music, lyrics, dialogue, song and dance, against impressionistic and moody backgrounds designed and lighted by Jo Mielziner and in costumes by Motley. Mr. Avon scored the particular hit of the evening with a plaintive and amusing narration in verse, with a tune reminiscent of "One Meat Ball," which is called "Woman Is a Rascal" and has for a refrain, "You don't get no food if you don't work today." Miss Jackson was runner up in favor with a song entitled, "Sleep, Baby, Don't Cry."

I am happy to report that I am again an ardent Katherine Dunham fan. I like "Carib Song" enormously.

New York Journal-American
Sept. 28, 1945

'Carib Song' Opens At Adelphi Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

Some misguided body has persuaded Katherine Dunham to string her overly familiar dances on a dubious thread of narrative and call the result "Carib Song." For reasons best known to himself, an impresario named George Stanton has fetched the self-styled "musical play of the West Indies" into the Adelphi Theatre. There, last night, a diminishing congregation received it with diminishing appreciation.

Suffering, as it does, from any number of things, "Carib Song" is mostly plagued by the maziness of monotony. The story by William Archibald is monotonous. The music by Baldwin Bergerson is monotonous. The choreography by Katherine Dunham is monotonous. The costumes by the Motleys are monotonous. The settings by Jo Mielziner are monotonous. Each is monotonous on its own. All are monotonous together.

Even the orderly orgiastic "Shango Ritual Dance" which brings the opening stanza of "Carib Song" to a belated close is nothing over which to get excited. Only yesterday the colored boys and girls from Harlem did the same thing better in "Memphis Bound." And the day before yesterday, in "Carmen Jones." And the day before the day before yesterday in——

* * *

Woman Is Rascal

The misguided somebody who has persuaded Katherine Dunham to string her overly familiar dances on a dubious thread of narrative is William Archibald. And the dubious thread of narrative has to deal with The Woman who, having buried The Mother and married The Husband, is not too unwillingly beset by the amorous advances of The Fisherman. He, The Fisherman, brings her fish under The Husband's insensitive nose.

That Husband most certainly is an unsuspecting fellow. Thinking nothing wrong of The Fisherman bringing fish, he goes his easy-going way, singing about "Water Movin' Slow" and "Today I Is so Happy" and "You Know, Oh Lord, You Know." Concurrently, The Fisherman goes his easy-going way, singing about "Woman, You Is a Rascal" and meaning it sincerely. Especially where The Husband's Woman is concerned.

But, after all has been said and sung and danced, and danced and sung and said, The Husband gets wise to a sort of fishy flavor in whatever The Woman has to say. Laughed at openly by The Fat Woman, The Tall Woman, The Fishwoman and The Madras Seller, The Husband demands to hear the wherefore and the why. He hears them at long last as the final curtain falls.

* * *

Song of Avon

As star, as co-director, as choreographer of "Carib Song," Katherine Dunham moves through the production slowly. And with infinite precision. She gives the impression—she gives me the impression, at any rate—that she doesn't in the least care whether the show goes on or whether the show goes off. And, well toward the evening's end, she treats "Oh, Lonely One" as if that didn't matter, either. It doesn't!

Avon Long, back on Broadway after the early, uncalled-for closing of "Memphis Bound," is persistently defeated by the sameness of his "Carib Song" assignment. As the piscatorial member of the eternal triangle composed of The Woman, The Husband and The Fisherman, he seldom manages to more than suggest his on-stage capabilities. Even so, his "Woman Is a Rascal" stops an easily stoppable undertaking.

Featured with Avon Long are William Franklin and Harriett Jackson. He's from "Porgy and Bess." She's from the late lamented "Memphis Bound." Mr. Franklin makes the most of "You Know, Oh Lord," "Today I Is so Happy" and "Water Moving Slow." Miss Jackson makes the most of "Oh, Lonely One," with Katherine Dunham moving meaningfully around... They should have called "Carib Song" "West Indian One-Note." They still can—if they hurry!

"Carib Song"—*continued*

NEW YORK PM
SEPTEMBER 28, 1945
—*Kronenberger*—

Dull Goings-On In the Tropics

PM Reviews

There are some very nice moments in *Carib Song*, but I found the thing as a whole a decided bore. This "musical play of the West Indies"—in which Katherine Dunham is starred—smothers the oldest and most perfunctory of plots in a great mass of folk doings: as a play, *Carib Song* is blatantly undramatic and most diminishingly picturesque. This being so, it is squarely up to the singing and dancing, of which there is a great deal, to pull the show through. And they don't. From Mr. Bergersen's pleasantly unexciting score emerge two or three very nice songs; from Miss Dunham's tropical choreography emerge three or four lively dances. But in neither field is there distinction or enough variety. Authentic or factitious, this West Indian dialogue, these West Indian doings, West Indian ditties, West Indian dances take on more and more of West Indian dullness.

The plot is merely a tropical version of the husband, the wife and the lover; and despite the tropics' reputation for sultriness, you'll find far snappier versions enacted in far colder climes. For garnishing, *Carib Song* offers voodoo (here called Shango), corn-sorting, church-going, clothes-washing, and conversation on not very advanced subjects. With the proper treatment, all these things can be fresh and fetching; here they mostly seem childish and contrived.

* * *

Miss Dunham acts more than she dances, and sprays her personality more than she does either. When she dances, she is as always very effective, though introducing no new effects. At other times she seems to me too conscious of her charm—which registers in inverse ratio to her doing anything to make it. Avon Long, who is the lover, has his best chance singing and dancing a lively number called *Woman Is a Rascal*; William Franklin, who is the husband, has a good voice and several opportunities to use it. Harriet Jackson drew the best song of the evening, *Sleep, Baby, Don't Cry* and put it across admirably. Jo Mielziner has done some nice sets and Motley some suitable costumes.

—Louis Kronenberger

NEW YORK TIMES
SEPTEMBER 28, 1945.

'Carib Song,' With Katherine Dunham and Avon Long, Makes Its Bow at the Adelphi Theatre

By LEWIS NICHOLS

The West Indies seemed pretty remote from New York last evening and "Carib Song" about equidistant from the normal excitement of the theatre. Curiously sedate in view of the people involved—Katherine Dunham and Avon Long among them—it wandered at a leisurely pace across the stage of the Adelphi. It sang a good deal, danced a good deal, talked a quiet little story and ended by offering nothing new, nothing even approaching the outstanding. An evening with its origins to the South should not be so slow; the heart beats faster there.

* * *

A musical play, or a folk play, all depending on the point of view, "Carib Song" is the work of William Archibald. It tells of a farmer and his wife, and a fisherman who falls in love with the latter. There is nothing complex about it save the pidgin English in which it is written—the "you ain't want me no more" set in, perhaps, for verisimilitude. On the course of its run from 8:30 until 11 o'clock, it goes through all the usual motions. There is the song about the rascality of woman—a good one, by the way—the voodoo dance, the lullaby, and something which apparently is even a dream ballet, Caribbean style. Inventiveness is not the strong point of "Carib Song."

Nor do the performers rescue the evening from the thick jungles. As the star, Miss Dunham has the most to do. A lively dancer when she tries, she prefers to wander casually through the story rather than take active part in it. There is no insistence that she be an actress like Miss Barrymore, of course, but she also could settle for less posturing, less repetition, in a cooler manner, of the things she had been doing for years. There is a sameness about the dances; they seem to have been born of the concert hall and with that as the destination. Only one, a ritual dance, has speed, and the outstanding performer of that is someone else—Tommy Gomez.

Avon Long also is wasted. A fine singer and dancer, he gets one good song—"Woman Is a Rascal"—and not a great deal more. William Franklin has a nice voice for the tunes he sings as the farmer-husband; and Harriet Jackson gives a pretty lullaby, "Sleep, Baby, Don't Cry." Baldwin Bergersen has composed the music, and perhaps amid more lively surroundings more of it would sound livelier too. The background of "Carib Song" is colorful, with its settings by Jo Mielziner and costumes by Motley, but a bright background sometimes can accentuate the tedium in front. That is true of "Carib Song." The hour of siesta has hit the West Indies, and it is an unhappy hour for good theatre.

"Deep Are the Roots"

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
SEPTEMBER 27, 1945.

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Well Planted

THE post-war Negro problem forms the core of a hard-hitting and engrossing play at the Fulton. "Deep Are the Roots" does not deal with the mere periphery of that problem. Written with sincerity and audacity by Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow and played with great skill by Barbara Bel Geddes, Gordon Heath and the others in the production, it is controversial and compelling. The theme occasionally becomes turbid. The scenes are frequently overlong and ill-assorted. But it is a work of meaning, delicacy and emotional power.

* * *

The authors, who will be gratefully remembered for "Tomorrow the World," bring a Negro war hero back to a Southern town. He forgets that he is just a plain nigger and is given the treatment by an elderly aristocrat and his henchmen, but he succeeds in disturbing the community to its very depths. There is even a doomed romance with the youngest daughter of the Senator, which is handled with great taste. There is no real resolution to the action, but there is plenty said and done at the Fulton to make "Deep Are the Roots" a striking piece of theater.

* * *

The acting shores up the drama each time that it starts to crack. Miss Bel Geddes, in one of the most exacting roles a young actress ever had to play, is superb as the youngster who asks a colored boy to marry her to somehow atone for the sins her people have done his race. Her performance is beautifully modulated; splendidly assured. Her scenes with Gordon Heath, who plays the Negro lieutenant back from the wars are profoundly stirring as well as disturbing. Since Heath matches her portrayal with one of grave dignity and bewilderment, the mated romance forms a terrible threnody running through the drama.

* * *

It is not a pleasant show, in the accepted sense of that term. It is always provocative. There are moments of brutal violence; passages of ringing dialogue and characters which stand up steadily even when the exposition becomes confused. Charles Waldron is perfect as the bigoted Southern Senator; Carol Goodner and Lloyd Gough are excellent as a Southern woman who thinks she is liberal and her Yankee fiancee who brings perspective to a desperate situation. Then there are acute minor portrayals by Evelyn Ellis and Harold Vermilyea. Elia Kazan's direction does not save the piece from becoming occasionally ragged and repetitious, but it has the sincereity and power which gives "Deep Are the Roots" the hallmark of distinction in every branch of the production.

'DEEP ARE THE ROOTS.'

Play by Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow; staged by Elia Kazan; setting designed by Howard Bay; costumes by Emeline Roche; presented at the Fulton Theater by Kermit Bloomgarden and George Heller Wednesday evening, September 26, 1945. The cast:

Honey Turner	Helen Martin
Bella Charles	Evelyn Ellis
Senator Ellsworth Langdon,	Charles Waldron
Geneva Langdon	Barbara Bel Geddes
Alice Langdon	Carol Goodner
Roy Maxwell	Harold Vermilyea
Howard Merrick	Lloyd Gough
Brett Charles	Gordon Heath
Sheriff Serkin	Andrew Leigh
Chuck Warren	George Dibo
Bob Isay	Douglas Rutherford

NEW YORK POST
SEPTEMBER 27, 1945

'Deep Are the Roots' Good Theatre, Good Acting

By Wilella Waldorf

The authors of "Tomorrow the World" have written a new play entitled "Deep Are the Roots," produced last night at the Fulton Theatre. Since it concerns the racial problem in the deep South, it has already been dubbed "a controversial drama" during its pre-Broadway tour. This means, apparently, that there is bound to be a profound difference of opinion concerning its merits and demerits, depending chiefly on the point of view from which the play is approached.

This reviewer has never lived for any length of time further South than Indianapolis, and never even visited below Alexandria, Va. In other words, a perfect specimen of what we understand is still referred to by those who have not forgotten the Civil War as a damnyankee.

We found "Deep Are the Roots" an uncommonly interesting and absorbing play. Not a great play. Not even a superlatively good one. But a serious and on the whole intelligent attempt to deal with a timely subject—the imminent return to this country of Negro soldiers, some of whom have been officers and almost all of whom have had an opportunity to see that their black skins are not looked upon in other parts of the world as they are in the deep South, or perhaps we should say, in America. They are Negro soldiers who have been fighting for the Four Freedoms.

On the way home from last night's premiere we made a point of discovering the reaction of a Southerner to the play — not a Southern Bourbon, but an enlightened gentleman born below the Mason-Dixon Line who has lived some years in the North.

Southern Viewpoint

It was his opinion that the cards are stacked too heavily against Southern Whites, that it is at best a surface presentation of an ugly situation, and that much—far too much—is left unsaid.

This is undoubtedly very true, particularly on the score of leaving a great deal unsaid. The authors of "Deep Are the Roots" are naturally forced to be pretty selective in presenting their material and they have not covered the subject as profoundly nor as completely as they would doubtless have preferred to do. The Negroes in the play are all "good" Negroes, and some of the whites cut sorry figures. But there are others who don't, and it was our impression throughout the performance that a considerable effort was being made to refrain from cheap sensationalism.

Yet the Messrs. d'Usseau and Gow are not inclined to pull their punches and their play is very good theatre. The second act is especially effective dramatically, and while the third falters here and there, the production is a good one and a cast of excellent actors performs with great feeling and spirit under Elia Kazan's direction.

Accents Not So Deep

Connoisseurs of Southern accents may perhaps be disturbed at some of the not-so-deep Southern accents in "Deep Are the Roots," but we can only report that nevertheless the play boasts one of the best acting ensembles encountered in many months.

Barbara Bel Geddes must be mentioned first because it is she more than any of the others who keeps the play from ever becoming merely cheap. Her performance as the younger of the two Southern sisters puts her in the first rank among Broadway's younger actresses.

Charles Waldron as the Senator who refuses to admit that the old order changeth, Carol Goodner as the daughter who befriends Negroes—up to a point, Gordon Heath as a Negro Lieutenant back from overseas, Lloyd Gough as a novelist from the North, Evelyn Ellis as the Lieutenant's mother, Helen Martin as a maid, and Harold Vermilyea as a Southerner about to run for Congress are all so good that we'd like to give each one a separate paragraph, but such critical luxuries went out when the paper shortage came in. Howard Bay has done a nice set.

It is the Northern novelist who confesses that he has no solution for the racial problem, but who adds that it might be of some help if we at least face it and admit frankly that we're confused.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
SEPTEMBER 27, 1945.

By Burton Rascoe

Don't Miss Seeing 'Deep Are the Roots'

On certain, very rare, occasions, the intrepid drama newsman, hot footing it from the theater to his typewriter, bewails the fact that he has only 45 minutes or an hour to formulate his impressions of a show he has just witnessed and to get his report (and verdict) down on paper. Most times, it doesn't matter if he has 45 hours instead of 45 minutes, his opinion of the show under review would be just the same, though perhaps not as readably expressed.

The above is by way of trying to calm myself down and not let superlatives so get the best of me that they may be meaningless, like a movie magnate's use of "supercolossal," or a Broadwayite's use of "out of this world," either one of which may mean that the item (or person) praised is at least worthy of second billing in a double-feature or a little better, taking it all in all, than a slice of processed cheese.

So, I am dispensing with astonishers and exhortations and simply offering it as my opinion that you will be missing something you shouldn't miss if you neglect to include "Deep Are the Roots" among the plays you wish to see this season. It will get you, I'll warrant that. It will hold you, trouble you, make you think, perhaps anger you. You may have the conviction (which I have) that the initial premise is entirely false, impossible and absurd, that the authors have stacked the cards, in favor of their propaganda thesis, with all the reprehensible skill of sharpers, that half the play is not only untrue to the relations between the whites and Negroes of the South but calculated to arouse old Civil War antagonisms between the North and the South.

A Star Emerges.

But you can't deny two things: that the play has strength, power, beauty, dignity, warmth and intelligent earnestness—or that, even outweighing the merits of the play itself, it has been the occasion for the emergence of a theatrical star of the very first magnitude—Barbara Bel-Geddes.

As I have been writing this I have tried to think back over a period of 40 years, or more, of playgoing to see if I could remember a young woman who had shown the exquisite resources of gesture, timing, voice modulations, facial expression and ability to get into her characterization that Miss Bel-Geddes showed last night.

I can't recall a single one who was her equal. Miss Bel-Geddes not only succeeded in giving the role life, but she did it so poignantly and realistically as, in effect, to carry the whole burden of the show on her shoulders.

I can't understand it. I don't know what has happened to Miss Bel-Geddes to make her an acting genius so quickly. It seems only a very short time ago that I had seen her, time and again, in bit parts in one flop after another. In none of them did she give evidence of being more than a sweet and pretty, amateurish and rather awkward kid. Now she is something wonderful! . . . May she lose nothing of the gifts that the gods have suddenly bestowed upon her and may she walk never except in beauty, as the night, and in humility.

Implausible Theme.

As to the play, it is very difficult for anyone who knows anything about the South (as I, who was born and reared in the South, imagine I do) to accept the premise of the play, which is this: that a Negro boy, who had risen to a lieutenancy and been in the Italian campaign and, while in England, had been a guest in a middle-class white household without experiencing any sense of differences of color, could come back to his home town in the South and accept an evening's rendezvous with the young white girl, in whose family his mother had been employed as a servant for many years, and with whom he had played, as a child, as Negro and white children "of the same family" always do in the South.

No I don't think a Southern Negro boy would do that. Pride, tradition, a sense of fitness of things would be against it. Even if a young white girl of respectable background should propose such a rendezvous, I think any intelligent Negro lad would reject the proposal, very gently perhaps, as unwise and inimical to them both. . . . The Messrs. D'Usseau and Gow, authors of the play, I think here deal in desirabilities, not in actualities; and theirs is a Northern view—colored a bit, perhaps, by hysterical propaganda—of typical behavior in the South. But they are sound about many Southern prejudices.

I have room only to pay my deepest respects to the art of Charles Waldron, as the intransigent old Southerner; of Carol Goodner, as an "enlightened" Southern woman, and of Lloyd Gough, Helen Martin and Evelyn Ellis. Gordon Heath, as the hero, may improve, but he was stiff and awkward last night. My deepest thanks, also to Elia Kazan, the director, who may have had something to do with the emergence of Miss Bel-Geddes as a heavenly portent in the theatrical skies. "Deep Are the Roots" is of gold medal quality.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
SEPTEMBER 27, 1945

'Deep Are the Roots' Discusses Race Prejudice—But at Length

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Any play which makes a critic think he is thinking is supposed, I believe, to get a good notice, just as one is supposed not to beat one's mother. On this basis "Deep Are the Roots," which was presented last night at the Fulton, should be hailed enthusiastically but gravely as Important Drama. Some of it is good and all of it is very well acted; but to me too much of it is obvious and too much of it is sheer tedium. I guess I jdst can't think.

James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau, the authors, gave us "Tomorrow the World" a couple of years ago and this was a very good, taut drama about the mind of a Nazi-trained boy. Now Mr. Gow and Mr. d'Usseau, looking for more problems, have worn themselves—and me—down to a nub examining the fate of the Negro in the Deep South.

Being a Westerner, I can report only as a playgoer and not as an expert on the South when I say that the playwrights' picture of a magnolia mansion and its white and dark denizens seems a little false. It is not that everybody says you-all all over the place, for nobody does; but the attitudes and speeches are a little too pat, too trimly patterned, to seem real. They are the artifices through which the two playwrights sit down and have a nice, long gabfest about the Negro question.

A Negro War Hero.

It seems to me, too, that in their very championing of the Negro, zealous and high-minded though their motives may be, they are patronizing him.

The particular problem of "Deep Are the Roots"—which means deep are the roots of prejudice—is a Negro lieutenant who has returned, a bemedaled hero, to the home of one ex-Senator Langdon, a fiery aristocrat of the mint-julep tradition. He is intelligent and well-mannered, this lieutenant, and his purpose is to become principal of the Negro school and teach his people some of the things he learned in the war. For one thing, the lack of race prejudice among Britishers.

To people like the senator he is a menace, a Communist. But enlightenment is slowly dawning in the Deep South, and the senator's two daughters seem very liberal. The elder of the girls is his patroness, sponsoring his career, working for a new school building, being very broad-minded. The younger, heaven protect her, discovers that she is in love with the lieutenant, just as he has been in love with her from childhood.

Everything Is in It.

A setup like that gives every opportunity for the authors to shoot the works. Prejudice, miscegenation, decaying aristocracy—all of the angles are there and "Deep Are the Roots" tackles every one. It even brings down a Northern novelist as an observer, so one can get the Northern point of view (which, incidentally, struck me as not being so hot either).

The result is an occasional passage of genuine, interesting conflict and a lot of debate. Elia Kazan's sedate direction fails to enliven the debates. In the end the young Negro seems to be about where he was in the beginning; he and the white girl are still decently and tenderly in love, and she's willing to marry him; but he knows the race barrier exists North or South and will not have her. It is she, not he, who leaves town.

As the girl, Barbara Bel Geddes is splendid—young, eager, attractive, assured and certainly a rising young actress. Gordon Heath portrays the lieutenant intelligently and with effective restraint. Charles Waldron's role of the senator may be a bit on the caricature side, but he gives it admirable pride and conviction.

Carol Goodner as the other daughter, Lloyd Gough as the novelist and all the others handle their assignments well, and Howard Bay's set is solid and handsome.

New York Journal-American
Sept. 27, 1945

'Deep Are the Roots' Opens at the Fulton

By ROBERT GARLAND

Under the mutual title of "Deep Are the Roots," two plays in the guise of one came schizophrenically last night into the Fulton Theatre. The first tells the stinging story of an admirable young Negro officer who comes marching out of World War II and into the Jim Crow insularity of his small Southern town. The second tells the clap-trap story of a missing watch and the anti-social dirty work its loss engenders.

The playwriting team of Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow is responsible for the two-plays-in-one which brought forth both cheers and hisses during the provocative course of its initial Manhattan showing. These, you will remember, are the bright, belligerent boys who wrote "Tomorrow the World" to their own profit and satisfaction. "Deep Are the Roots" gives signs of being equally profitable and satisfying.

But even if it makes a million dollars and gives them unmeasured social solace, even if it causes settos in the streets and brings about a Congressional investigation, it still is not the daring dramatic document it could have been—it should have been!—had Co-Dramatists d'Usseau and Gow not 'dragged in that missing watch and superimposed its minor melodramatics upon their vastly more important drama.

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Black Soldier Boy

Taking the authors of "Deep Are the Roots" at their written-to-be-spoken words, the Langdons are a fine old family of the Deepest South. There is Senator Ellsworth Langdon, head of the house, a Bourbon and a bore. There is Alice Langdon, his elder daughter, a pretender and a snob. There is Genevra Langdon, his younger daughter, amorously entangled with Lt. Brett Charles, the homecoming black soldier boy.

Theirs is the must - be tragic love story d'Usseau and Gow set out to tell. Tell it they do, with sincerity rather than conviction, for one-and-a-half acts of the drama's three. It is just about the middle of the play that, for no reason you or I can think of, the herring of the stolen watch is drawn across the action's trail. Neither you nor I can find use or excuse for such makeshift melodrama.

But there it is. And, off and on through the remainder of the evening, there it remains. Surely Senator Langdon does not need that poor, cooked-up excuse for exterminating the homecoming black soldier boy. A better, a vastly more reasonable excuse is all too definitely at hand. That better, that vastly more reasonable excuse is his daughter Genevra's open infatuation for her beloved dark-skinned lieutenant.

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Drama vs Melodrama

From here, however, the two plays in the guise of one proceed, the play that tells the stinging story of the admirable young Negro officer who comes marching out of World War II and the play that tells the clap-trap story of the missing watch. They constantly, disastrously, get in each other's way. Time after time, the major, the vastly more important drama is set aside so that the superimposed and minor melodramatics may be seen and heard. This just shouldn't be!

The playing, I fear, is as uneven as the play-making. Best of the players is Gordon Heath, the natural-born New Yorker who is as sincere as he is simple, as simple as he is sincere, in the trying and tricky role of the Black Boy who does not win the White Girl. His is one of the outstanding performances on Broadway. Where it is as right as right can be, it might have been woefully wrong.

Barbara Bel Geddes is almost understandable as the Genevra Langdon who loves not whitely, but too well. Nobody could be more understandable than she. Carol Goodner as Alice Langdon and Charles Waldron as the Senator, do what they can with curiously incredible roles. Harold Vermilyea is a stoogeful Yankee. Evelyn Ellis, as Brett Charles' mother, is grand . . . "Deep Are the Roots" would have made theatrical history as one straightforward play. As two contradictory plays, it will not.

NEW YORK TIMES
SEPTEMBER 27, 1945.

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

After spending an early season fitfully dreaming, the theatre last evening decided to get in touch with the modern world again. "Deep Are the Roots" is the first work of the fall with an idea, the first not to shy away from a problem. Dealing with the Negro in the South, it has been written with deep sincerity by Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow. Believing in it fully is an excellent cast, which plays with warmth and an equal sincerity. "Deep Are the Roots" is not only a plea for the understanding and final settlement through justice of one of America's problems, but it is, in narrower range, good theatre. It offers thought—and a show; it is well worth seeing.

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The story is of the present. A young Negro returns from the wars to the Southern mansion in which he grew up. He is an officer; he has been decorated, and in Europe he had run into friendliness, not prejudice. The owner of the mansion, a retired Senator, believes in keeping the Negro in his old place. One of his daughters has given lip service to equality, the other had grown up with the boy and likes him. The Negro becomes the head of a school, hoping to help in the education of his race, but before much can be done he is falsely accused of the theft of a watch and is thrown into jail. The younger daughter, his friend, knows he is in love with her and offers to marry him. He refuses, realizing that would be the solution of nothing, that they would be just "an island."

Not all of "Deep Are the Roots" is as good as its instinct; indeed, there are a great many flaws. In order to keep action going on the stage, the authors have contrived the business of the theft, which makes the play sag below its level of discussion. The matter of the love affair between the young daughter and the boy also is a theatrical trick; intermarriage is not the first step in racial equality, as the authors, themselves, concede at the conclusion. The character of the former senator is not tightly drawn; at the beginning he shows no signs of the completely warped and vicious man he becomes at the end.

The complaints probably are not of violent consequence, and about the acting there can be no complaint at all. Barbara Bel Geddes, as the younger daughter, is giving a performance which she will find difficulty beating later on. She has grace and tenderness and an honesty which breathes life into the part. Charles Waldron is the Senator and very good at it until towards the end the authors let him down. Carol Goodner is the older sister, offering forthright playing in a difficult role, and Gordon Heath is quiet and sincere as the young Negro boy. Elia Kazan has done an excellent job of direction, and Howard Bay's setting is out of the Senatorial South.

It is good to have the theatre back in New York again.

NEW YORK PM
SEPTEMBER 27, 1945

—*Kronenberger*—

Faulty, But Worth Seeing

At the Fulton last night the new season finally got going. I say this despite the fact that artistically and psychologically *Deep Are the Roots* seems to me a very bad play. If I notwithstanding recommend it, it is because this new work by the authors of *Tomorrow the World* is a combination of quite effective melodrama and very pertinent social drama, ably produced. It holds your interest and compels your respect. Nothing else this season has come close to doing either.

Deep Are the Roots, like *Tomorrow the World*, is a problem play. It deals with the return of an intelligent young Negro soldier to a Southern town. He had gone off to war as the docile, respectful servant's son of an important Senatorial family; he returns an officer and a hero who in Italy and England had mingled on terms of equality with white people, and who is now roused to fight for his own people's rights — still well-intentioned but no longer docile. The Senator, a hopeless Bourbon, feels kindly toward Brett; the Senator's liberal older daughter Alice feels very kindly toward him and wants to help him—but also to boss him. The Senator's younger daughter Genevra feels much more than kindly—she is drawn to Brett emotionally, and he, since childhood, has been in love with her.

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Trouble clearly lies ahead for these two; but before it breaks, Brett gives offense by taking small liberties he wouldn't have taken before the War; and the Senator, his gorge rising, suddenly turns on him. The Senator talks himself into imagining that Brett has stolen a missing watch as a pretext for having him arrested. Alice, in the midst of trying to dissuade her father, learns about Brett and Genevra, becomes far more violent than the Senator, clutches at the theft story and has Brett arrested herself. I won't go into the unknotting of this situation, which calls into play most of the worst social problems of the South, beyond remarking that tragedy is averted, but Brett left a bitterer man, Alice a sadder but wiser woman, Genevra a baffled youngster, and the Senator not merely a Bourbon but an incipient Ku-Kluxer.

The good things about the play—its theatrical drive and its social conscience—are far from negligible things; they make the play worth seeing and I don't mean to slur them over. But just because *Deep Are the Roots* is primarily a challenging social drama in its intentions, if too much a melodrama in its effects, one must all the more sharply look its faults full in the face. And they are very grave faults. They are not simply the common faults of the propaganda play—the too determined effort to drive home a message, the set speeches, the protests, the cliches. The graver mistakes made by *Deep Are the Roots* involve its taking on too many things at once; its not using a plot that convinces or really works in with its theme; its fumbled psychology and inconsistent character-drawing.

As a problem play, *Deep Are the Roots* doesn't really hew to the line of tackling the returning Southern Negro soldier whom the war has altered. It doesn't seem concerned with a specific situation; it quickly runs head-on into most of the Negro-White conflicts that have always animated the South; Brett might as easily be returning from the North as from the war, and the Senator's wrath as easily have been aroused by seeing the boy wearing one of his neckties. The problems of the South flow, truly enough, one out of the other; but the treatment here robs the play of a specific sharpness, a true topicality. Much worse, the relationship between Genevra and Brett and the whole question of intermarriage it engenders are really not pertinent to this kind of social drama because they are not typical of it; at the very least, many other problems must be solved before intermarriage becomes a crucial one. But if such a problem *is* raised, surely it should have a whole play to itself, and chiefly follow lines of personal drama, personal tragedy.

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The plot, again—by which I mean the business of the stolen watch—is not at all convincing. The Senator, both in terms of his previous attitude toward Brett and of the nature of Brett's "misconduct," is much too suddenly and violently provoked; moreover, he has the deepest kind of feeling toward Brett's mother. Psychologically it just won't wash. And if we say "Forget psychology—the Senator, with a little better provocation would certainly have done what he did," we come up against something even more serious. For just because the general make-up of such men as the Senator is beyond question, it is a great pity when the specific provocation is not convincing. It's just that way that propaganda digs its own grave. And though space is lacking for me to go into further detail, *Deep Are the Roots* plays ducks and drakes with its characterizations, goes astray in its psychology, time and again. Finally, there is nothing wrong with the play being melodrama, but its melodrama and its social drama should coalesce, and they don't. You scarcely remember that in some sense *The Little Foxes* is a melodrama about stolen bonds; you can't ever forget that *Deep Are the Roots* is very much a melodrama about a stolen watch.

Yet the play, though it fumbles its problems, does not blink them. It looks hard at what's wrong with the reactionary South, at its deep roots of prejudice, which make even its better-minded citizens revert very suddenly to type.

Mr. Kazan has directed the play with excellent judgment, if now and then at too slow a pace. As Genevra, Barbara Bel Geddes takes a difficult and not too surely written part and turns in a beautiful performance, both touching and convincing. Gordon Heath makes a good Brett, and Carol Goodner a good Alice. Charles Waldron plays the Senator with quiet perception, and if his performance in its later stages loses some of its point, it is because the characterization loses much of its plausibility. Lloyd Gough is competent, too, as Alice's Yankee fiance, and the minor roles are suitably filled.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

NEW YORK SUN
SEPTEMBER 27, 1945

'Deep Are the Roots' Strong and Bitter Drama, Played by a Fine Cast.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Arnaud d'Usseau and James Gow, authors of "Tomorrow the World," have turned to the South and to the problems of racial prejudice in a strong and bitter drama, "Deep Are the Roots," brought last night into the Fulton by Kermit Bloomgarden and George Heller. It's a play to be welcomed and recommended. It has been expertly staged by Elia Kazan.

D'Usseau and Gow, in presenting the story of the return of a Negro war hero to the drowsy, deep-South town of his birth, have written some exciting theater into a study of good will and tolerance, and of the collapse of high-minded liberalism when put severely to the test.

The Fulton's new play is eruptive. It is also somewhat errant. It wobbles in a wavering third act after its powerful second, but the total effect is one of great strength. There are moments when the sheer power of "Deep Are the Roots" reminds you of Lillian Hellman's playmaking at its best. And there is a performance by young Barbara Bel Geddes that is positively brilliant.

The d'Usseau-Gow drama is told in three acts. The scene is the living room of the fine old Langdon mansion, down in the magnolia and mint julep country. The Senator is an aged and decaying aristocrat, retired from politics, living out his life, retaining his lifelong prejudices on the subject of the white race versus the black and wielding a terrible power in his community. His daughter, Alice prides herself on her freedom from bigotry. Alice's young sister, Genevra, is an outspoken girl whose childhood playmate was the Negro son of the woman long faithful in the Langdons' employ.

This Negro, after an absence of three years, comes back to the Langdons as a war-decorated lieutenant, grown accustomed to social equality. His adjustment to back-home conditions isn't easy. Alice is his eager and ready champion until her sister defiantly confesses her love for him. It's then that the horrified Alice reverts to her upbringing and calls the Sheriff to arrest the Negro on the false charge of stealing a watch. In the final act, in which several characters get considerably out of hand, Alice again undergoes a change of heart and pledges herself to try for greater tolerance and stronger understanding of racial problems. But the Senator is still blazingly fanatical. The play leaves you with the impression that the Senator's way will continue to be the way of life in this unnamed community.

The cast is superb. Barbara Bel Geddes is a completely charming ingenue; she is a very fine young actress. She has the role of the young girl who confesses her love for the Negro lieutenant and who, in the presence of her sister, offers to be his wife. It is not an easy scene to play and certainly it was not an easy one for many in last night's audience to watch.

Carol Goodner brings genuine feeling to the complex character of Alice. There are excellent performances by Gordon Heath as the Negro, Lloyd Gough as a Northern writer, Evelyn Ellis as the family servant and Charles Waldron as the hidebound Senator. He is the Senator to the life. And Harold Vermilyea is exceptionally good as the bumptious Cousin Roy, who must have a hand in everything.

"Deep Are the Roots," notwithstanding its faltering third act and its tendency to break into speechmaking, is vibrant theater. And I suspect it's a hit.

"You Touched Me"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
SEPTEMBER 26, 1945

'You Touched Me!' This Season's First Competent, Amusing Play

By JOHN CHAPMAN

At last there is a new play in town—a play written by men who have a feeling for talk and character, acted by men and women who are actors; a play handsomely and carefully staged by a man who knows that the theatre can be a place of illusion and charm.

It is "You Touched Me!" which Guthrie McClintic presented last night at the Booth—a slight, romantic comedy which at times becomes almost too tenuous and occasionally verges upon the precious, but which contains among its gentle delights a performance by Edmund Gwenn which is no less than lovable.

Tennessee Williams, who wrote the wispy and rueful "Glass Menagerie," has collaborated with Donald Windham, a newcomer to the theatre, in making a D. H. Lawrence short story into a piece for the stage. They do not use humor as a bludgeon; they use it lightly and deftly. They try once or twice to voice some message or other about the world of the future, but since nobody alive seems to have any concrete plan for tomorrow they cannot be too harshly blamed for sounding mixed-up.

Fine Role for Gwenn.

And for Gwenn they have made a fine pixie role. This short, round, bouncy gentleman portrays a sea captain who has retired to his home in rural England, there to get drunk and to be hamstrung, henpecked and circumscribed by his spinster sister and by a young daughter who, under her aunt's tutelage, is practicing up to be a spinster.

He rebels, but his spirit and body are weak and his rebellions always come to no more than a remorseful hangover until the day when his adopted son, gone five years, returns on leave from the RCAF. It is war time—1942—but here in this female-ridden, closed-down pottery establishment the war has been remote until the boy brings it with him like a breese from a bomber's sky.

He had been a foundling, this lad, and the old captain took him so that there would be two men to stand against the women—and stand they had, until the lad had gone to Canada for a try at the new world. Now the war has brought him back.

Love Conquers, of Course.

It has brought him back to a home full of strange conflicts, but he has come in hope of love—just the touch, the physical touch, of human affection. He discovers in his adopted sister a young woman afraid; a young woman so shy, so fragile, that she makes the sister in "The Glass Menagerie" look like Bessie McCoy. Frankly, I got a little tired of her, but I didn't let it spoil the rest of a delightful evening.

The captain and the soldier outwit the spinster aunt, of course, and do it quite amusingly. Love finds its way, picking its path delicately between some of Mr. Williams' tenderest conceits. And when Mr. Gwenn gets drunk and tells the story of his romance with a lady porpoise who tried to make him while he spent nineteen days on a hatch cover after a shipwreck—well, that's completely enchanting comedy. So, too, is his imitation of a fox having a gourmet's repast in a chicken yard.

Montgomery Clift gives another of his sensitive, intelligent performances as the boy. Catherine Willard is just about perfect as the menacing aunt, and Neil Fitzgerald is amusing as what the captain calls an ecclesiastical capon. The role most difficult to realize is that of the daughter, for all she has to do most of the time is blench and quiver; so I suppose Marianne Stewart does as well with it as anybody could.

The setting, and presumably the costumes, by Motley are splendid—and, as I have said, Mr. McClintic's staging revives one's faith in things theatrical.

'YOU TOUCHED ME!'

Play by Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham, suggested by a short story of the same name by D. H. Lawrence; staging by Guthrie McClintic; setting designed by Motley; presented by McClintic, in association with Lee Shubert, at the Booth Theater Tuesday, September 25, 1945. The cast:

Matilda Rockley	Marianne Stewart
Hannis Rockley	Catherine Willard
Phoebe	Norah Howard
Hadrian	Montgomery Clift
Cornelius Rockley	Edmund Gwenn
The Rev. Guildford Malton	Neil Fitzgerald
A Policeman	Freeman Hammond

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM,

SEPTEMBER 26, 1945.

By Burton Rascoe

'You Touched Me' a First-Rate Comedy

At long last the new season has produced a play which I can recommend to one and all, wholeheartedly and without serious reservations, as a work of art, edification and entertainment. It is "You Touched Me," a comedy by Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham, based upon a short story by D. H. Lawrence, which opened at the Booth last night. It is adult comedy, provoking many hearty laughs. It is also a vigorous and subtle affirmation of the life-spirit, or, as Bergson called it, the elan vital.

As anyone who is familiar with the work of the late D. H. Lawrence knows, that Nottinghamshire coal miner's son, who became one of the most discussed writers of modern times, was obsessed with the idea that a false sense of righteousness and morality (induced by the preponderance of women over men in the United Kingdom) had not only made British middleclass women frigid but had given them such a whip-hand over men as to devitalize them.

Lawrence's short story, from which the title and the idea of the present play are derived, was only a minor skirmish in Lawrence's militant crusade to free British women from the fear of giving normal expression to their humane and natural emotions and to emancipate British men from the bleak sort of matriarchy which, Lawrence contended, their womenfolk had imposed upon them, stifling their masculinity and killing their spirit of adventure.

"You Touched Me," as a play, is about the final triumph of a bibulous old former sea-captain over the domination of himself, his daughter, and his adopted son, by a self-righteous and mentally sadistic spinster sister. Although the home in which she lived and ruled and the income on which she thrived in piety and pretension were her brother's, the unwed female had got the hearty buckeroo under her thumb after he had gone on a binge in the Caribbean, foundered his ship, and suffered the dishonor of losing his skipper's certificate. Thereafter, of course, he was hers to pity, suffer martyrdom for, take care of and — keep drunk, by constantly telling him what a disgraceful sot he was.

The return, on a brief furlough, of the waif the skipper had brought up, revives in the old boy a will to fight for his own survival as a free individual. His chance comes when he senses that a deep love has sprung up between his foster-son and his daughter — a love thwarted, for pecuniary as well as more obscure reasons, by the girl's spinster aunt, who has made a zombie out of the girl. The skipper's greatest difficulty lies in overcoming the fears and reticences that have been instilled in the boy and the girl by the harpy.

The play offers a field day for Edmund Gwenn, as the lovable old toper. He squeezes every bit of juice out of the characterization, reaching a high point in his narration of the time when, after being long at sea and in his cups, he responded to the amorous advances of a flirtatious lady porpoise. He had tears of laughter pouring down my cheeks at that and at several other points.

Catherine Willard, playing somewhat the same role she handled so superbly in "The Deep Mrs. Sykes," does a grand job as the harpy; Neil Fitzgerald is quite satisfactory as the ecclesiastical neuter, and Marianne Stewart did fairly well as the spiritless girl; but Montgomery Clift after his previous performances was a distinct disappointment to me. He has no drive, no variation in tone, no spirit; he has only a trick of staring with a hurt look and making, at the same time, a wry twist with his mouth, which was all right when he was a disillusioned soldier in "The Searching Wind," or a psychoneurotic in "Foxhole in the Parlor," but it has no relation to the character called for by the text of the play. Mr. Clift's simpering listlessness is the only fault I can find with Guthrie McClintic's direction of the play.

NEW YORK PM

SEPTEMBER 26, 1945

—Kronenberger—

A Wobbly Bit Of Symbolism

PM Reviews

An ailing season limped a bit ahead last night—to the point, at any rate, where a play could give rise to discussion rather than sheer abuse. But such progress was largely relative, and those who hoped that with his new play the author of *The Glass Menagerie* would let Broadway find its stride are doomed to disappointment. Mr. Williams and his collaborator, Mr. Windham, have contrived—out of a D. H. Lawrence short-story which I have not read—an odd work of sex and symbolism which but for its many serious set-speeches, might pardonably be mistaken for a species of farce or burlesque. The point of their message, I'm afraid, is decidedly damaged by the broad strokes, the black-and-whiteness, the conscious or unconscious buffoonery of their playwriting: it is impossible to take what actually goes on seriously, and not quite possible—in view of what it is supposed to mean—to laugh it off. The authors themselves have apparently taken a midway position by dubbing *You Touched Me!* "a romantic comedy."

The theme is certainly made obvious enough. The forces of growth and decay, of stagnation and change, of scared repression and lusty liberation are fighting it out in an English country-house. On the one side: a prudish, snobbish, "congenitally virginal" old maid and a prissy, bloodless rector. On the other side, a thigh-slapping, yea-saying old salt and old soak; and his foster son, a young flier clamoring for a new world and a war-against-war. The conflict centers in the old soak's very repressed young daughter, whom the old maid aunt has shackled and whom the young flier wants to set free and marry. Well, he does set her free and marry her in the end, as every one knew he would, and sex triumphs even if symbolism has to stand in the corner.

The trouble with the whole thing is that the authors have gone to such extremes with their characters and introduced such farcically melodramatic goings-on into their plot that *You Touched Me!* keeps wavering on the verge of caricature. One might just accept so very dreadful an old maid, or so very rowdy an old salt, or so very prissy a clergyman; one simply cannot, outside farce, accept all three in the same play—even for symbolic purposes. Again, there are things like the old maid rushing forth from her own bedroom to snag the flier as he enters her niece's, and thereupon summoning a policeman to arrest the boy for attempted rape. If, for such a situation, the authors have not carefully built up an atmosphere that is grimly pathological, the audience can't help supplying for itself an atmosphere of real or mock-melodrama.

Possibly things were much better in the original Lawrence short story. Lawrence was capable of great intensity, and of making humor and seriousness coalesce. One seems to catch the Lawrence note in the old maid's going out to shoot a fox and killing a rooster by mistake: that was *his* kind of symbolism. But our present authors, extending their symbolism to the world of the future, yet confining the matter to mere words and speeches, haven't made the content of their play square with it. It is rather in certain sharp moments of comedy or broad moments of horseplay that *You Touched Me!* comes to life and becomes good theater. But the next minute somebody is making another speech.

The undefined tone of the play has led to considerable variety of acting. Edmund Gwenn, in the virtuoso role of the old soak, has himself a high old time and gives the audience a pretty good one. Montgomery Clift, playing the now passionate, now pert, now humorous, now serious young flier, manages to keep something of a realistic foot on the ground by never overdoing any of his moods. As the young heroine, Marianne Stewart hasn't much chance, not because the girl is so repressed but because she is so unreal. For me it was Catherine Willard as the old maid, and to a lesser extent Neil Fitzgerald as the clergyman, who carried off the honors and gave the production the right kind of lift. They played their roles with deadpan caricature and with style.

Mr. McClintic's direction is lively. The Motley set is less a set in some ways than a problem in architecture, and well solved.

—Louis Kronenberger

NEW YORK POST,
SEPTEMBER 26, 1945

'You Touched Me!' Is Not As Touching as It Sounds

—— By Wilella Waldorf ——

Tennessee Williams, author of the admirable "Glass Menagerie," has collaborated with Donald Windham on a play called "You Touched Me!" suggested, they say, by a story of that name by D. H. Lawrence. Romantic comedy is what they called it in the program last night at the Booth Theatre, flanked by a quotation from the aforesaid Mr. Lawrence to the effect that "One must speak for Life and Growth amid all this mass of destruction and disintegration."

All right then. One must speak for Life and Growth. The Messrs. Williams and Windham have spoken, and the result is a confusion of tongues and a strange medley of dramatic styles, including everything from poetry to farce, from lecture platform harangues to several one-man comedy turns for Edmund Gwenn, cast as an old sea captain forcibly retired after taking on too much rum one day and cracking up the Polar Star on a reef. Except for Mr. Gwenn's carryings-on, which were often very amusing, the piece left us with that apathetic feeling so prevalent this season.

Gwenn's Lurid Tales

One must speak for Life and Growth, so Capt. Cornelius Rockley, retired, is a full-blooded, roistering old party overflowing with vim, vigor and virility, given to shocking the conservatives in his rural English neighborhood by telling the most shocking stories. For instance, there was the time a female porpoise with the most gorgeous figure made love to him, a highly susceptible ship-wrecked mariner.

Capt. Cornelius is very, very male. He is always full of gusto and almost always full of liquor because he lives in a household dominated by his sister Emmy, a really devastating example of aggressive virginity whose baleful influence has so cowed the Captain's lovely daughter Matilda that she has become almost as frigid as her aunt.

Matilda, in fact, is scared stiff to let herself go in any way, and so when the Captain's adopted son, a one-time charity boy now commissioned in the Royal Air Force, comes back on leave, the battle is on between the forces of Life and Growth (represented by the male wolves) and their opponents, the fenced-in virgins, assisted at crucial moments by the local rector, caustically referred to by the Captain as "that ecclesiastical capon."

This sounds as if it might have the makings of a farce somewhere, and now and then that's just what it is. But only now and then. Most of the time the authors have their thesis to think of, but some of the time they don't seem to be thinking clearly about much of anything, and the result is that "You Touched Me!" boils down to a hopelessly confused patch-work of a play whose "romantic comedy" seems very strained indeed, and whose efforts to preach Life and Growth to the English amid destruction and devastation often seems not only oddly pretentious but downright presumptuous.

Not So English

Perhaps this phase of the matter struck us especially because, despite the presence in the cast of Edmund Gwenn, an excellent British actor, and a proper British maid in the person of Norah Howard, "You Touched Me!" is about as English as Times Square.

Montgomery Clift is a talented young player and they've made him Canadian for the sake of the accent, but he isn't any too comfortable trying to handle the Messrs. Williams and Windham's soap box orations and flights of romantic poetry while posing also as a Libido in RAF uniform out to see that Life Goes On.

Catherine Willard has an even worse time with a part that is almost pure caricature, and Mr McClintic, as director, has not helped much. When Sister Emmy is at her worst, there was nothing for it but to let her slip straight into farce, yet it strikes the wrong note. Even more at a loose end is Marianne Stewart, an attractive ingenue forced to spend most of the evening acting as if she were teched in the head. Yet all that's really wrong with her, according to Capt. Cornelius, is a bad case of "acquired virginity."

New York Journal-American

Sept. 26, 1945

'You Touched Me' Comes to the Booth

By ROBERT GARLAND

Well, there was no sere and mellow drama last night at the Booth Theatre to frighten professional first-nighters. Instead, Producer Guthrie McClintic, in association with Co-Producer Lee Shubert, came forward with "You Touched Me!" "You Touched Me!" is a self-styled romantic comedy by Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham, out of D. H. Lawrence's justly uncelebrated short story of the same name.

Nobody, not even Guthrie McClintic, has any right to produce a poor play as well as "You Touched Me!" is produced. For a long time, you can't make up your mind whether it is any good or not. I can't at any rate! Last night, in 45th Street, right at the Shubert Alley, the McClintic magic misled my better judgment. Until well along into the opening stanza, Ole Massa Guthrie had me almost fooled.

Almost, but not quite. For it slowly but surely dawned on me that there was less in "You Touched Me!" than met the eye and ear. At the same time, and contradictorily, there was too much going on. Too much talking. Too much acting. Too much story-telling. Too much gesticulating. Too much pausing for effect. Too much posing. Too much climbing about the scenery. Too much everything but play!

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Dumb but Dutiful

When you get down beneath the talking, the acting, the story-telling, the gesticulating, the pausing for effect and the climoing about the scenery, you discover that "You Touched Me!" is merely another play about the soldier who, returning home, finds his family, his friends and his next door neighbors exactly as he left them. Only, perhaps, more unattractive. This comes as a big surprise. So he, in turn, makes speeches at them.

At the Booth, the homecoming warrior is Hadrian Rockley. And the home to which he comes is a curious cottage somewhere in rural England. The head of the house is his adopted father, Cornelius, an ardent old alcoholic who is fond of giving imitations. Imitations of lovelorn porpoises, of frightened hens, of barking dogs, of sailors at the steering wheel. Cornelius has a dumb but dutiful daughter, Matilda.

Ignoring an old maid aunt by the name of Emmie, a young maid of all work by the name of Phoebe, a Church of England clergyman by the name of Guildford, and the customary last act policeman by the name of Freeman, "You Touched Me!" does little but retell the familiar footlighted legend of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, and boy gets girl in time for a happy curtain. Why Boy Hadrian craves Girl Matilda is a mystery.

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Deserved Promotion

The battle of Broadway goes on insofar as Montgomery Clift is theatrically concerned. At the beginning of the war he was Cpl. Samuel Hazen in "The Searching Wind." In the middle of the war he was Cpl. Dennis Patterson in "Foxhole in the Parlor." And now that the war is over, he is Flight Lt. Hadrian Rockley in "You Touched Me!" Equity, or someone connected with the theatre, has had him promoted. And rightly!

Edmund Gwenn has a field day—and I mean a field day!—as the ancient alcoholic who is good at imitations. Seldom have I enjoyed such husky, if hammy, histrionics. I'm indeed happy when Norah Howard, pretending to be the modest maid of all work, interrupts his naughty narrative about a lady porpoise with a purpose. Phoebe, I take it, has heard the tale before. And failed to find it funny.

Marianne Stewart means more to body than soul as the Girl Matilda to the Boy Hadrian of Montgomery Clift. Neil Fitzgerald is out of "Life With Father" as a dim-witted Church of England holy man. Catherine Willard, as Emmie Rockley, seems not to have heard that "The Deep Mrs. Sykes" has perished... Nowadays, at the Booth, if you spell S-A-R-O-Y-A-N backward, you've got "You Touched Me!"

You're welcome to it!

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
SEPTEMBER 26, 1945.

By HOWARD BARNES

Welcome!

THE theater is becoming literate and imaginative again. "You Touched Me!" which has opened at the Booth, is no great shakes as a piece of dramatic construction, but this Tennessee Williams-Donald Windham play has heart and considerable eloquence. Compared to other early season offerings, it is extremely satisfying. Much of its especial sorcery is bound up in the brilliant performances of Edmund Gwenn and Montgomery Clift, as a couple of renegade characters who run against the tide of staid suburban English life. Fortunately, they and their colleagues have something with which to work.

The romantic comedy owes some slight debt to a D. H. Lawrence short story of the same name, but the debt cancels out quite completely when Williams and Windham are trapped in some foolish symbolism about a red fox, a rooster, lilies and stubborn virginity. The authors might better have skipped over the Lawrence mysticism, summed up in a program note as "one must speak for life and growth amid all this mass of destruction and disintegration" and made the piece their own. When they are setting it in 1943, with a bitter bomber pilot and a wonderful old mariner giving a running commentary on a sorry world, it never fails to strike fire.

The plot is not nearly as complicated as some of the mumbo-jumbo in the script would lead one to suspect. It merely relates the tender relationship of a venerable and bibulous sea dog and the foster son who falls in love with a cloistered young girl. The former has staunch things to say about the petty deceits of society. The latter comes through with two or three blazing speeches about the war which would do a great many people a great deal of good to hear. The action is halting, even with Guthrie McClintic's precise and knowing direction. "You Touched Me!" is frequently verbose. Praise be, it has the artistry to quicken into some scenes of genuine dramatic power.

Gwenn, as you must know without the telling here, is an actor who can do no wrong. He is wonderful in the part of the sodden, goatee-waving skipper who revolts against his spinster sister to give his daughter and a shy orphan lad a chance for a new generation of happiness. Clift is perfectly matched with him in the role of the boy flyer, who wins his woman when he talks with touch, and Marianne Stewart is remarkably good as the potential spinster, although the play does not give the lift to her ultimate conversion which it should have done. Meanwhile, Catherine Willard, after a fumbling start, is fine as the dessicated old maid who tries to disrupt a romance. "You Touched Me!" is a flickering entertainment, saved time and again by adroit acting, but it is very welcome at this particular nadir of the season.

NEW YORK TIMES
SEPTEMBER 26, 1945.

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Last Spring, Tennessee Williams was setting a good many silver cups upon his bureau, the result of his having written "The Glass Menagerie." This fall he has come back with a collaborator, an acknowledged source and another play, "You Touched Me!" which opened last night at the Booth. This second of Mr. Williams' dramas to reach the local boards is not an improvement nor an advancement; in fact, it represents quite a step down. Another discussion of the groping for life, "You Touched Me!" is verbose and filled with lofty and long speeches; it needs editing as well as cohesion. Finally, it does not have the warm acting which glossed over the imperfections of "The Glass Menagerie," for the members of its cast play in several styles. It is, in short, a disappointment.

Mr. Williams and Donald Windham have based their story on D. H. Lawrence's story of the same name. "You Touched Me" is of a retired and now drunken sea captain, his austere sister, his daughter, and a young man he had taken from an orphanage some years before. The boy, now a Canadian flier, comes to the home for his leave, and recognizing that the daughter soon will be like her aunt, tries to free her. Basically the play is a love story, telling the young man's efforts to persuade the girl to run away with him, an effort which the captain aids and abets. He knows he had been defeated by life—or rum, to be fully exact—and he wants his daughter not to bow before at least the former.

As a single turn last spring, Mr. Williams showed a knack for dialogue, and at times he and his collaborator do so now. There are a number of sharp, character-defining remarks, some poetic phrases. But too many of the speeches are set and long; they seem to wander along indefinitely, their heads lost in the clouds. Part of "You Touched Me" is earthy, for the captain contributes some good, brisk ideas, and that fact makes a second level, with the play forced to struggle along on both. The ultimate result is that it is a potpurri of several things, none completed and none entirely believable. Again, "You Touched Me" needs a good vigorous editor.

"You Touched Me" also could do with an editor for the acting. As individuals, the players are on the whole good, but they go at their evening's work in such diverse styles as to suggest they are in different dramas. That, too, may be the fault of the script, which gives Edmund Gwenn, as the captain, a typically irascible, yet kindly, figure; and Catherine Willard, as the sister, a sharp cartoon. Mr. Gwenn is amiable, of course, and occasionally captivating, and Miss Willard has the air of treating the whole thing as a prank, which is all right, too, if taken separately. When they must play together, however, the relationship is not so good. Montgomery Clift is the young man, Marianne Stewart the girl; theirs is the poetry and Mr. Clift's, especially the speeches. Norah Howard is good as a maid, Neil Fitzgerald as a cartoon minister.

Every playwright is entitled to a slight fall from grace occasionally. "You Touched Me" is Mr. Williams'.

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NEW YORK SUN,
SEPTEMBER 26, 1945.

You Touched Me,' Presented at Booth, a Tenuous and Fragmentary Comedy.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Tennessee Williams came along toward the end of last season with a poignant study of frustration in "The Glass Menagerie" and now, writing with Donald Windham, he gives us "You Touched Me," presented last night at the Booth. This new piece, notwithstanding the directorial skill of Guthrie McClintic, comes forth as a tenuous and fragmentary comedy, and it is never quite one thing or the other.

Here the authors, writing of the "horrible noiseless danger of shut-in places" and of the bringing of reality to a young girl whose world has consisted largely of pottery and petunias, achieve moments of humor and charm, but their scenes don't hold together as a satisfactory play.

There are several good performances upon the Booth's stage. McClintic's directorial touches are sharply in evidence throughout the evening. But "You Touched Me" is curiously scattered, and it falls to be the play we hoped to get from the young dramatist who wrote "The Glass Menagerie."

As it goes its rambling way, "You Touched Me" presents the case of a wistful, fretful and inebriated sea captain, who lost his ship because of rum, and who is living with his suppressed young daughter and his spinster sister, strong-minded and relentless. The captain, in both his subdued and roaring moments, sets out to bring about the marriage of his young daughter to his adopted son, on leave in rural England in the uniform of a combat flyer. The combination of the skipper of the Polar Star and the young flyer who wants to whisk the girl off to the reality of Montreal when the war is done is quite too overpowering for the meddling and domineering Emmie Rockley, wonderfully well played by Catherine Willard. Miss Willard has been in her George Kelly plays to good advantage. She now gives a composite of both Mrs. Sykes and Mrs. Craig.

Edmund Gwenn's performance as the sister-ridden sea captain is one of considerable gusto, but it is not without its somewhat tedious moments. Montgomery Clift, one of the town's rising young actors, is fresh and invigorating as the Canadian bomber pilot, although at times he is quite inaudible. Neil Fitzgerald brings a lively sense of caricature to the role of the Rev. Guildford Melton, who is to be the spinster's eventual prey. Marianne Stewart is very pretty and is a young actress of undoubted ability, but the role of the shut-in daughter calls upon her to say and do strange things.

"You Touched Me," played in an effective three-level setting, is a play of considerable charm, some high-flown dialogue and many digressions. It isn't a comedy to set you cheering, but it reveals that McClintic retains his directorial magic and it gives you the comforting realization that the new season has begun to show signs of life.

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"The Ryan Girl"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM.

SEPTEMBER 25, 1945.

By Burton Rascoe

'The Ryan Girl,' Exciting Melodrama, Opens

When the time comes for the summing up of the faults and virtues of the year in the theater, no theatrical season can properly be described as a well-rounded one unless among the offerings there has been an outstanding and very popular melodrama. "The Ryan Girl," which checked in at the Plymouth last night, makes an early and very substantial bid for that honor for the season just beginning.

"The Ryan Girl" is more dramatic, perhaps, than melo, a little too civilized for those who love to shriek or weep at counterfeits on the stage and a little too obvious in treatment for the blase Broadwayite; but the story is an unusual one; the drama is unfolded with credibility and mounting suspense; and the production is newsworthy as well as admirable.

The newsworthiness of the production is four-fold: it marks the Broadway debut of June Havoc in a straight dramatic role, and a very auspicious beginning of a new career for Miss Havoc it is; it brings back to the live-actor theater Edmund Lowe, who has been tilling the golden fields of Hollywood, without respite and without conspicuous aging, for 23 years; it is the occasion, also, for the return to Broadway of Edmund Goulding, as author and director, who has been absent in the cinema capital ever since he wrote "Dancing Mothers," a hit of 1924; and the play is graced by the presence of Una O'Connor, a product of the famous Abbey Theater, Dublin, who is one of the most marvelous actresses I have ever been privileged to watch.

Miss Havoc Talented.

Miss Havoc, who has beauty and grace, gave signs in the musical, "Sadie Thompson," of very considerable dramatic talent; but I was not prepared to see her play as exacting a role as she has in "The Ryan Girl" with the skill she displayed last night. She still has much to learn about voice changes to indicate varying moods and emotions (she speaks too much in a monotone), but she shows high promise as a dramatic actress, who has already proved her worth as an intelligent and very delightful singing comedienne.

Mr. Lowe, as the menace, shows that he has not let work before the camera and microphone cause him to forget the more exacting requirements of the stage. Others in the cast, imaginatively directed by Mr. Goulding, include the beauteous and expert Doris Dalton; Curtis Cooksey, John Compton, Calvin Thomas and Richard Gibbs, all of whom give good account of themselves. A pleasing set is designed by Raymond Sovey.

Story of the Play.

The play tells of the return of a gangster wanted on a murder charge, who has evaded extradition for seven years in Venezuela. He seeks exoneration for himself through the popular sentiment created by his son's winning the CMOH. The gangster and his wife, an ex-Follies girl, had not wanted a child and when their son was born, had given it to another Follies girl to use as a snare for a rich husband. The foster-mother and her husband (himself ignorant of the boy's true parentage) had brought the child up with loving care. The foster mother is at first afraid the real mother will take the boy away from her and then afraid the gangster father will ruin the boy's life by exposing his real parentage. Justice is done in a thrilling climax.

The play came into New York ahead of original schedule in order to take advantage of an opening in the theater booking jam. Some crudities and deficiencies in the script might have been eliminated by longer sessions out-of-town. No doubt they will be ironed out during the week.

'THE RYAN GIRL.'

Play by Edmund Goulding; staging by the author; setting designed by Raymond Sovey; presented by the Shuberts, in association with Albert De Courville, at the Plymouth Theater Monday, September 24, 1945. The cast:

Weavy Hicks ..... Una O'Connor
Miley Gaylon ..... Edmund Lowe
Venetia Ryan ..... June Havoc
Harold Tyler ..... Curtis Cooksey
Lieut. George Clark ..... John Compton
2d Lieut. Victor Sellers ..... Richard Gibbs
Jane Clark ..... Doris Dalton
Edwin Rourke ..... Calvin Thomas

New York Journal-American

Sept. 25, 1945

June Havoc Stars In The Ryan Girl'

By ROBERT GARLAND

Yesterday, what Broadway needed was a tough, tense, turbulent melodrama with a cast that knew exactly how to play it. Today, what Broadway has is a tough, tense, turbulent melodrama with a cast that knows exactly how to play it. "The Ryan Girl" is the name of the exciting young fulfillment at the Plymouth Theatre, hard by the Alley of the Messrs. Shubert. It will remain there for no few nights to come.

As a matter of theatrical reporting, the new season in general and June Havoc in particular come ardently into their own with the arrival of Edmund Goulding's latest play. It is the first he has put his name to since the "Dancing Mothers" which, back in 1925 and next door at the Booth, had Edgar Selwyn as collaborator. The West Coast has not withered, nor movie-making staled Mr. Goulding's East Coast abilities.

He knows quite well that melodrama is the oldest, the boldest form of on-stage entertainment. From, say, Sophocles' "Electra," through Shakespeare's "Othello," to Bayard Vieller's "Within the Law," most of man's best plays have been melodramas. And, although it's as down-to-date as its Hattie Carnegie gowns and Lowell Thomas broadcast, "The Ryan Girl" is in the grand edge-of-your-seat tradition.

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Lamppost Love

It should hearten you to hear that, along with almost every other worthwhile fiction, the melodrama in 45th st. begins at the beginning, continues through the middle and stops when it gets to the end. While so doing it is as unequivocal, as single-minded, as amoral as the characters it projects. That Ryan woman is a so-and-so who makes no bones about it. That Gaylon man who is her everything is even more so.

The story, of which there is plenty, centers insistently about the two of them. About Miley, the small-time gangster who hangs out with the bigger and better bump-off boys. About Venetia, the has-been "Follies" girl who loves him beyond all reason. Hers is the lopsided love contraltos croon about at lampposts, the "I love you because I hate you and I hate you because I love you" sort of thing.

Hers is also the love of which plays are made, the foundation on which "The Ryan Girl" is constructed. For if Venetia had not loved Miley because she hated him, if Venetia had not hated Miley because she loved him, their offspring, Lt. George Clark, would never have been in the danger of disgrace and the shadow of suspicion. In simpler words, there would have been no melodrama for June Havoc to burst out in.

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June in September

The others, all seven of them—all eight of them if the radio voice of Lowell Thomas is counted—must not complain if I insist that last night's success of "The Ryan Girl" was the success of June Havoc as a notable legitimate actress. You saw promise, and more than promise, of it in "Pal Joey," in "Mexican Hayride," in the musical version of "Rain" called "Sadie Thompson." Right now, at the Plymouth, these promises are fulfilled.

As the man she loves because she hates him, as the man she hates because she loves him, Edmund Lowe is in topmost form. Nobody on stage or screen—or on both, as is the case with Mr. Lowe—can pretend to be a tough guy as believably as he. As Texas Guinan remarked about a dear, dead gangster friend of hers, there's nothing as soft as a hard-boiled egg. She might well have been talking about Miley Gaylon.

Edmund Goulding has chosen a well-nigh flawless cast for Edmund Goulding's well-nigh flawless melodrama. Una O'Connor, Curtis Cooksey, Doris Dalton and John Compton are to the manner born, underplaying into the skillful hands of their author-director ...Broadway being in the mood for tough, tense, turbulent melodrama with a cast that knows exactly how to play it, "The Ryan Girl" is all that, believe me.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
SEPTEMBER 25, 1945

By HOWARD BARNES

Rather Weak

THERE is more than enough plot in "The Ryan Girl." Unfortunately, the new melodrama at the Plymouth employs it neither wisely nor well. There is always a latent promise of exciting theater in the show. The one fancy killing of the climax does not keep it from being sorely disappointing. The best that can be said for this Edmund Goulding work is that it is so dull throughout the first two acts that a fairish third stanza builds enormously. Even the actors get a break for a short interlude. Several of them deserve far better.

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Goulding, a repatriate from Hollywood, has conceived a complicated dramatic continuity about an ex-Follies girl who is confronted simultaneously with her gangster husband and an unwanted son who has become a war hero under another name. The possibilities in this theme, as any movie mogul would assure you, are infinite. The best that the author-director has been able to do with them is to have his characters talk endlessly about the lurking threat of the boy's discovery of his true identity, until the gallant little mother drills her rat of a husband through the head.

Edmund Lowe, who is also renewing his acquaintance with the stage after many years of celluloid make-believe, has a more felicitous home-coming than Goulding. His performance of the trigger man, who thinks he can beat a murder rap on the strength of his son's heroism, is assured and sinister. There is no faltering in his first theatrical assignment since 1922. Since June Havoc supports him very capably once the melodrama starts to roll a little, there is no lack of bravura acting in the piece. Miss Havoc makes the final moments of the production vaguely gripping. There is an awful lot of waste motion until that point. Goulding's direction does not help matters a bit.

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The bright, articular characterization of "The Ryan Girl" is that of Una O'Connor, as the maid and protectress of the middle-aged tramp. She breathes vitality into every scene in which she appears, almost fooling one into thinking that the play has subtlety and depth. Doris Dalton, Curtis Cooksey and John Compton behave professionally, if not too persuasively and Raymond Sovey has designed a trim setting. As an associate remarked last evening, "The Ryan Girl" is like a taxi with the meter clicking wildly, but going nowhere at all.

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NEW YORK SUN,
SEPTEMBER 25, 1945

'The Ryan Girl' Tawdry Melodrama, and It Is Also a Very Bad Play.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The theater went back last night to the mechanics of Sammy Shipman, to the dark melodramatic plottings of Max Marcin, and to the violence of Paul Armstrong, but the skill of the old masters is sadly missing. "The Ryan Girl," presented at the Plymouth by the Shuberts and Albert De Courville, doesn't do the trick. It is a botch.

The genial Edmund Goulding, returning to the drama after twenty years of success in Hollywood, comes forth an author and director of the Plymouth's new play. It has been his notion for some time that the theater could use a good, old-fashioned melodrama. Yes, it certainly could. But "The Ryan Girl" isn't another "Lawful Larceny." Nor is it a "Nick In" or a "House of Glass." And Lowell Sherman isn't around to play it.

Goulding's clumsily written and indifferently acted play is the tale of a gangster, hiding out in Venezuela to dodge a murder charge, who returns in the hope of winning the leniency of the law by exposing the fact that he is the father of a young war hero about to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. The mother of the boy, Venetia Ryan, is an ex-"Follies" girl, who was the blackmailer's sweetheart at the age of 16 and whose baby was adopted in infancy by another "Follies" girl, now a matron of some standing. So Venetia, to prevent the diabolical Miley Gaylon from exploiting the young lieutenant's heroism, turns her gun on Miley, and it's his finish. It will be up to the understanding police to call it suicide, as they once did in an epic melodrama entitled "Broadway."

Goulding, for all his screen achievements, hasn't written a play since "Dancing Mothers" in 1924, and "The Ryan Girl" reveals him to be quite out of practice. His dialogue is frequently absurd, his plot manipulations cumbersome, and at no time does the acting come to his rescue.

June Havoc is the Ryan girl. Miss Havoc presents an enormously attractive appearance and during the evening she shows flashes of skill, but she is in need of experience in dramatic roles, and in need of direction and a play. Edmund Lowe, absent these many years, makes Miley seem a singularly dull and dull-witted criminal. Doris Dalton is strangely exalted in an impossible part. Such experienced players as Calvin Thomas and Curtis Cooksey wander in and out helplessly. Raymond Sovey's setting is all right.

"The Ryan Girl" has the ingredients—sex, tough talk, blackmail, self-sacrifice, murder—but Edmund Goulding has woven them into a tawdry melodrama, and a very bad one.

NEW YORK POST
SEPTEMBER 25 1945

'The Ryan Girl' a Drama of The Pause and Stare School

By Wilella Waldorf

Edmund Goulding has been away from Broadway many years. According to last night's program at the Plymouth Theatre, he went to Hollywood just after penning "Dancing Mothers" for Helen Hayes. Since that time he has apparently been so completely preoccupied with movies that he hasn't had a chance to keep up with the stage.

Judging from his latest play, "The Ryan Girl," produced last night at the Plymouth, he is under the impression that while the films have been forging ahead all these years, the legitimate theatre has turned backward and is now rapidly reapproaching the dawn of the century. "The Ryan Girl" is an artificial melodrama of Mother Love and ex-"Follies" girls, vintage of 1912, only much duller than the sort of hokum they used to turn out then.

Every few minutes as we sat in the theatre last night waiting for June Havoc (ex-"Follies" girl) to shoot Edmund Lowe (the rat), it occurred to us that this must be a revival of something better left in its grave. But it just happens that we have seen revivals of such gaudy old successes as 'Within the Law" that seemed much more up to date, and certainly far more exciting than Mr. Goulding's new play.

The fact that the war comes into it only makes it all seem somehow, worse than it might otherwise have been. A young flying officer is awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, and his parents are very proud. Only they are his foster parents. The boy is actually the son of Venetia Ryan, "one of the girls" and a gangster named Miley Gaylon, who fled to Caracas seven years back to beat a murder rap.

Venetia had turned her child over to a more motherly "Follies" pal who was lucky enough to marry a millionaire, and now that he's a hero, Miley proposes, somewhat vaguely, to claim the boy as his son, on the theory that the police will be inclined to let him off easier if he is revealed as the father of a Congressional Medal of Honor winner.

Perhaps this might not have seemed so silly, or so exhausting, had it been rammed over the footlights with old-fashioned dramatic punch. But Mr. Goulding's direction is of the studied meditative school, calling for Miss Havoc and Doris Dalton (playing the foster mother who married a millionaire) to stare into the footlights for minutes on end smiling weary little smiles, then telling the audience at great length all that happened twenty years before.

Hard on the Actors

Miss Havoc is an appealing personality with talent that is evident even under such adverse conditions, and now that she has broken away from musicals and turned to straight dramatic acting, let us hope she will get her chance in something a little less trying than "The Ryan Girl." She has something.

Mr. Lowe, returning from films, gave a routine tough-guy performance of an extremely unconvincing role and Miss Dalton often seemed bewildered by the whole thing. Una O'Connor as one of those motherly maids with more sense than everybody else put together, had better luck but there were times when even she just stood and brooded.

Raymond Sovey's setting struck us as architecturally perplexing in that Miss Havoc kept disappearing into a bedroom that must have been about the size of a small coat closet, flanked as it was on one side by the terrace and on the other by the hall (complete with audible elevator).

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